Working in a Chain Store:
an ethnography of a Japanese company

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of "Futajimaya", a large chain store in suburban Tokyo, based on fieldwork conducted as a part-time employee at the store over a period of one year in 1990-91. This study aims to critically re-assess and deconstruct the view of Japanese companies as homogeneous, vertically structured groups characterised by harmony and consensus. Rather, a range of different representations of company-employee relations is shown to exist within the frame of a single large enterprise. Gender and generation are important themes, and the role of the company in mediating the transition to adulthood for its new recruits is examined, as is the importance of employment in the achievement of mature, gendered identities for both male and female employees.

The thesis is structured with reference to the culturally significant categories of *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside), and traces the shifts in the way Japanese companies are represented according to context. It begins with the outside view as found in texts written for a foreign audience about Japanese companies in general, moving through a consideration of the ways in which three retail companies seek to represent themselves to that section of their domestic audience which furnishes their potential recruits, to an examination of the varying ways in which Futajimaya is viewed by its employees. Notions of harmony and conflict within the company are also examined, and the conclusion discusses the implications of this research for more general debates on outsider versus insider discourse and notions of formalisation and power.

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Part One

Background

Chapter One

Introduction

In a televised debate on Japanese society, broadcast by the BBC during the Japan Festival in Britain in 1991, Asada, a Japanese philosopher, argued that of the various great "isms", the one that characterised Japan was not capitalism but corporatism.[1] This comment is perhaps indicative of the importance to the overall debate on Japanese society of the way in which Japanese companies are represented. Large corporations are seen both within Japan and from a non-Japanese perspective not only as dominating Japanese society, but also as exemplifying the key qualities of Japanese society as a whole.[2] Within anthropology,the debate on how Japanese companies are best understood therefore draws together strands from wider debates on Japanese society, including the relative importance of conflict and consensus; issues of gender; the interaction of individual and group, as well as broader theories of how Japanese society is structured. This field has also attracted comment from a range of other academic disciplines, including economics, history, and management studies, as well as generating a vast quantity of popular literature.

This thesis aims to critically examine and deconstruct notions of "The Japanese Company" with reference to fieldwork conducted over a period of one year (1990-1991) in a branch of a large chain store in suburban Tokyo.

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[1]"Corporatism" in Japanese is *kaishashugi*, from *kaisha*, meaning company, and *shugi*, meaning ism. This is a rather neat play on words, as it is also an inversion of the Japanese word for socialism, *shakaishugi*).

[2]For example, K. Yoshino, in a recent review of populist writing on Japan, tells us that: "The Japanese company is regarded by businessmen and others as the microcosm of uniquely Japanese society, and...'company men' as the typical bearers of the 'uniqueness' of Japanese social culture." (1992: 183).

Further, the research presented here challenges the dominant discourse portraying employees as having a largely passive relationship with their company: the male employee enveloped by the company for which he works, while the female employee figures only briefly in the company frame before moving to the domestic sphere. Instead, the evidence from this research suggests a dynamic interaction between company and employee, with the company constantly redefining itself in response to pressures from its members and potential members. Also, the company appears to play an important role in the lifecourse of its members, as facilitator and mediator in the process of acquiring adulthood and maturity, thus moving our attention from a focus simply on employment relations to wider concerns of the way in which notions of adulthood are constructed, disputed, and negotiated in Japan.

Before addressing these issues, in this introductory chapter an outline is given of the historical context within which current discourses of company relations have arisen, together with the main texts that have been produced on "The Japanese company" in the post-war era. This is followed by a section considering more general theoretical issues raised by the debate on Japanese companies, and the way in which these relate to recent trends in the anthropology of Japan and in anthropology as a whole. The contribution of my thesis to the theoretical issues raised is then considered, and the chapter concludes with an outline of the main body of the thesis.

1.1 Historical background: the development of "Japanese" management and the creative use of tradition

As detailed in section 1.2, Japanese management is often depicted as a unique system characterised by lifetime employment, pay by seniority, and enterprise unionism, combined with a tendency to envelop all aspects of its employees' lives. These practices are further represented as drawing on the traditions of pre-industrial Japan, and therefore as being distinctively different to practices in "the West". A seamless continuity is thus implied between "traditional" and current practice in Japan.

An examination of the history of Japan's industrialisation fails to support this view, and shows instead marked discontinuities and periods of conflict leading to the gradual extension of the system described above as "Japanese management" to cover male permanent employees of large companies, whether blue or white collar, after World War II. However, at the same time, there has been a conspicuous tendency to articulate these developments in terms of Japanese traditions. It is this twin process, of change on the one hand, articulated in terms of continuity on the other, that is examined in this section.

The institution in pre-industrial Japan that is most often cited as the antecedent of the modern Japanese company was the merchant house, where employer-employee relations were structured along quasi-kinship lines, following the organisational principles of the Japanese household, or *ie*, described in greater detail below. However, many of the companies of Meiji (1868-1912)[3] Japan did not have merchant house antecedents, and for

[3]See glossary for an explanation of Japanese era names.

blue collar workers in particular, quite different employer-employee relations prevailed.

Two distinct types of blue collar workers existed in the early years of Japan's industrialisation. In the textile industry the workforce largely consisted of young women, initially daughters of samurai households, but later from farming families in the countryside. These women are generally depicted as working for a few years before returning home to marry, but recent research shows that in fact a majority of them instead moved on to other employment, so that a more typical pattern was to move between a number of employers, often continuing in employment after marriage (Molony 1991).

In heavy industry, on the other hand, the workforce was largely male, and in the 1890s and 1900s were mainly recruited either as day labourers or as sub-contracted labourers through labour bosses or *oyakata*, who controlled a number of workers or *kogata*.[4] The male workers were further distinguished from white-collar or female employees by their low social status. Terms used to describe male factory workers included *karyū* (inferior), *geretsu* (base) and *reppaisha* (the defeated) (T. C. Smith 1988: 240).

As far as the working conditions of the male workforce were concerned, Hirschmeier and Yui (1975) distinguish two historical precedents from the Tokugawa era (1603-1867): that of the day labourer - an exchange of money

4The terminology here is interesting, as *oyakata* is derived from the word *oya*, meaning parent, while *kogata* comes from *ko*, meaning child. However, as elaborated below, it is at least open to question how far the *oyakata-kogata* relationship was modelled on that of parent and child in the sense of being governed by non-economic ties rather than a mixture of economic necessity and coercion.

for work with no obligations on either side, and the lord-retainer type which they argue provided a model for *oyakata-kogata* relations. However, it may be questioned how far ties of a non-economic nature such as loyalty or care for one's followers were transferred from lord-retainer relations to the relations between *oyakata* and *kogata*, given that factory work in the early stages of industrialisation was characterised by poor working conditions and low pay, coupled with the high level of coercion exercised over workers by their employers or labour bosses.

Between the 1890s and the 1920s, the combination of a shortage of skilled labour and a high labour turnover led to a re-appraisal of management methods in the blue-collar sector for both male and female workers. In the 1910s and the 1920s large companies in heavy industry moved away from the labour boss system to direct recruitment and training of workers by the company, together with greater security of tenure and the introduction of a range of benefits for long-serving employees including year end bonuses, company savings schemes, company paid pleasure trips and company housing and health care. In the textile industry also inducements to remain longer with the company were introduced, although these were somewhat different in type given that the workforce was female and essentially conceived of as temporary. Textile workers were therefore offered additional schooling, often with a view to preparing them for marriage. Courses offered included cooking, sewing, learning musical instruments, *ikebana* (flower arranging) and the tea-ceremony (Hirschmeier and Yui 1975: 199). Bonus systems related to length of service were also introduced.

By the 1920s, then, some features of what has come to be known as the Japanese employment system were beginning to emerge, at least in large-

scale enterprises. Long-term employment for male workers was becoming the norm, closely linked with the practice of recruiting young men and training them within the company. Enterprise welfare was becoming a distinguishing feature of large enterprises, with the introduction of an ever widening range of company welfare benefits.

Nenkō-joretsu (seniority pay) had also begun to appear at the time of World War I, although it only became widespread for blue-collar workers after World War II. During and after World War I large enterprises made considerable profits, and this fact, combined with labour shortages, led to wage increases and provoked the question of how these increases should be distributed. Previously, issues of promotion and pay increases had largely been determined by the company, often through its foremen. Though ostensibly guided by considerations of merit and skill, in practice foremen were susceptible to bribery and often guilty of favouritism, and it was in an attempt to stop such practices that workers in a number of large enterprises campaigned for pay rises to be granted uniformly, on a sliding scale of objectively measurable factors, such as seniority. In 1917 there were two large strikes over this issue, with a compromise solution reached in both cases whereby pay would be calculated according to a formula where the majority of pay was determined by fixed factors and a proportion of not more than one third left to the company's discretion (T.C. Smith 1988: 255).

Although a discontinuity can thus be demonstrated between conditions in the 1890s, when the labour boss system prevailed in heavy industry, and those of the 1920s when permanent employment, a limited application of the principle of seniority pay, and a wide range of welfare benefits began to emerge for an elite of male employees in large enterprises, these

developments were articulated and justified in terms not of change, but of continuity and an appeal to tradition. Labour unrest, the growth of labour unions and campaigns for factory legislation were met by management with the assertion that factory laws and approaches to industrial relations based on notions of conflict between employer and employee were not appropriate to the Japanese situation. Such a view of industry was associated by management and government spokesmen with the West, and opposed to a notion of harmonious Japanese style industrial relations based on the structure of the *ie*. For example, the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce observed in 1898 that:

> In our country, relations between employers and employees are just like those within a family. The young and the old help one another and consult together in both good times and bad, and they are enveloped in a mist of affectionate feelings.
>
> (Marshall 1967:57)

Tamura Masanori, head of the Shimano Spinning Mills, wrote in 1908 that:

> From ancient times in our country there have been warm feelings (*onjō*) between employer and employee. It has been a relationship similar to that between the (feudal) lord and his retainer.
>
> (Marshall 1967:57)

The Nagoya Chamber of Commerce drew a contrast between Japan and the West:

> The situation in our country naturally differs from that in Europe and America. The relationship between employer and employee in the countries of Europe and America is generally nothing more than an exchange of labour and money.
>
> (Marshall 1967:58)

Taira (1970) argues that this reformulation of employment relations in terms of "tradition" was a last ditch attempt on the part of management to control the workforce after various more coercive measures such as contracts restricting the mobility of labour had failed. The need to control the workforce, or, more specifically, to reduce labour turnover and retain skilled labour arose from the increasing need for skilled workers to deal

with advanced technology and the high costs of training such workers only to have them leave the company a short time later.

T. C. Smith (1988), on the other hand, argues that the development of the ideology of familism and the pattern of employment associated with it cannot be understood as simply a cynical manipulation of workers by management. Rather, the blue collar workers themselves phrased their demands in various labour disputes in terms of improvements to their status, and desired above all to get rid of the many petty distinctions that differentiated them from white-collar workers and helped to create the image of factory workers as the lowest of the low. The language of their petitions to management was the language of an appeal to benevolence and to "paternalistic" or familistic ideals, rather than the language of rights and class conflict. So in effect what the male factory workers were asking for was to be made full members of the company, on the same terms as their white-collar colleagues.[5]

In any event, the dominant discourse of employment that emerged in Japan in the period 1890 to 1920 was that of familism, and the importance of continuity and Japanese tradition. This discourse was used by both workers and management, though often with quite different ends in mind, and thus constituted a kind of language in terms of which debate could take place. Even Uno Riemon, one of the leading advocates of management reform in the Meiji period, who complained of the abuse of notions of

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[5]On entry to the company, new recruits were divided up into three status groups depending on their level of education. These roughly correspnded to blue-collar, clerical and technical, and managerial. Each group was treated differently in terms not only of wages, holidays, and working conditions, but also in terms of more symbolic differentials: each had their own toilets and eating facilities for example. Movement between status groups after entering the company was rare, and allocation to a status group was thought to reflect moral worth, not simply aptitude for different kinds of work (T.C. Smith 1988).

tradition by some employers,[6] phrased his suggestions for reforms of employment relations in these terms. Uno argued for management based on "warm feelings", "loyalty", faithful service of one's superiors and "paternalism", which he took to be "national traits"(quoted in Hazama and Kaminsky 1979: 89).

A further characteristic of this discourse of company relations was the stress on the difference between Japan and the West, and the importance of retaining Japanese identity. One aspect of this was the rejection of the ideologies identified with the West of laissez-faire and economic individualism. Rather than being driven by the profit motive, the Japanese entrepreneurs of early Meiji argued that they were motivated by the desire to serve the state, and that industrialisation was necessary in order to preserve Japan from the threat posed by the West (Marshall 1967). And rather than glorifying the businessman or entrepreneur as an ideal cultural type, as happened in the United States, the Japanese retained the model of the feudal warrior, or samurai, as ideal. Emphasis was placed on the similarities between the pre-Meiji samurai and Meiji era managers, both in terms of personnel (a number of Meiji managers were drawn from the former samurai class) and in ideals - service to lord being replaced by service to company, and thus the state (Marshall 1967).

Several distinct strands of Japanese "tradition" were therefore appealed to in the creation of a corporate discourse for industrialised Japan: the *ie*, particularly as manifested in the Tokugawa merchant houses, on the one

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[6]"I have observed the terrible abuses that some employers have inflicted by forcing workers into submission in the name of this fine old lord-retainer tradition. This kind of idea should be rejected as an obstacle to the solution of labour problems." (Uno, quoted in Hazama and Kaminsky 1979:89)

hand, and on the other hand the lord-retainer model derived from quite a different social class. And as an overarching ideology and moral system, Confucian notions of the importance of service to the state, were explicitly contrasted with profit-seeking individualism associated with the West.

This appeal to, or creation of tradition, in a time when the modern Japanese nation state was being created, and Japan was simultaneously opening herself to and defending herself from the West finds echoes in Europe, with the development of European nation states and the creation of traditions associated with states or regions, as documented in Hobsbawm and Ranger(1983). It also provides support for Hobsbawm's contention that invention of tradition probably takes place more frequently during rapid social transformations and that the use of the notion of "tradition" constitutes a response to change in the modern world and "the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant." (Hobsbawm and Ranger (ed.) 1983: 1-2). [7]

This use of "tradition" and nationalism in the Japanese case was further consolidated during the Second World War, when the government actively encouraged the equation of company and family, and prohibited the movement of labour between companies. Service to employer was equated with service to the country, and employers were held responsible for the provisions of the basic needs of their employees at a time of shortages in the wider market (Nakane 1970:18). This peculiar climate was not conducive to the dissemination of alternative discourses of employment, which might be regarded as seditious, although some alternatives had been around from

[7]Bestor(1985) notes a similar process in his study of an urban Japanese neigbourhood. However, rather than the term "tradition", Bestor favours the use of the word "traditionalism", defined as "the manipulation, invention, and recombination of cultural patterns, symbols, and motifs to legitimate contemporary social realities", a process he suggests is pervasive in modern Japan (Bestor 1985:123).

the beginning of Japan's industrialisation. For example, ideas drawn from Christianity and Marxism had been influential in the early Union movement, while ideas of laissez-faire economics had had some impact in management circles.

In the post-war era, the labour union movement, which had almost disappeared by the end of the war, revived under the auspices of the Allied Occupation, and membership grew rapidly. In the prevailing conditions of extreme poverty and labour surplus, this emergent union movement campaigned successfully for the twin aims of job security and a living wage, calculated on the basis of seniority, for their members. This had the effect of extending the practices of lifetime employment and pay by seniority, which had previously been only patchily applied, to all union members, although this meant that large portions of the workforce were still excluded, as will be explored in more detail below. At the same time, after a considerable amount of unrest, Enterprise Unionism emerged as the dominant form of unionism. It is therefore generally agreed by historians[8] that the features subsequently described as characterising "the Japanese employment system": lifetime employment, pay by seniority, and enterprise unionism, were only established in their entirety after World War II.[9]

[8] See for example, Inagami 1988.

[9] At least as far as blue collar workers were concerned - white-collar workers benefited from many of its features from well before the war.

1.2 Writing corporate culture: a historiography of texts on Japanese companies

Although the earliest general publication on Japanese society to command a wide audience, Ruth Benedict's The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, was researched during the war and published in 1946, the boom of published texts on Japanese companies did not take place until later in the post-war period, with much of it concentrated in the 1970s and 80s.[10] During the post-war era, Japan has experienced rapid economic and social change, and there have also been marked shifts both in the way management practices thought to be "traditional" and "Japanese" are evaluated within Japan, and in the way in which Japan is perceived outside her borders. Alongside these changes, parallel shifts can be traced in the ways in which Japanese companies are represented in the published literature.

In the immediate post-war period, there was great poverty in Japan, and industrial production was almost non-existent. It was also a time of social upheaval, as the U.S. Occupation authorities sought to create a new order in Japan. "Democracy" was the catchword of the day, and many aspects of Japanese society were condemned as "feudal", not only by the American occupiers but also, somewhat later, by Japanese intellectuals, as sociologists, anthropologists, and social psychologists began writing once more in the 1950s (K. Yoshino 1992:35). In the field of industrial relations also it was a period of unrest, and of re-negotiation of employment conditions by the union movement, as has been briefly outlined above. On

[10]The peak of publications on Japan's supposed "uniqueness" also occurred in the 1970s (K. Yoshino 1992:2).

the management side, too, the fifties saw a loss of confidence in practices identified as "Japanese", and an intense interest in American management.

Against this background, the early studies of Japanese companies and employment practices were concerned to identify elements that appeared 'traditional" or "feudal". For example, Bennett and Ishino (1963), who conducted their research during the American occupation, focused on "the traditional features of Japanese culture", in particular the "system of interpersonal relations...derived from feudalism and familism"(Bennett and Ishino 1963:27). This led them to focus in particular on the *oyabun-kobun* system of labour-contracting outlined above, mainly from the perspective of enquiring how long such a system could persist as Japan modernised.

Although most of these early works took a negative view of Japan's "feudal" legacy, there were also some dissenting voices. Bellah (1957), for example, in his analysis of the values of pre-Meiji Japan, argued that the ethical teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism as promulgated to the various social classes of Tokugawa Japan, were particularly well-adapted to the needs of an industrialising state, in much the same way as Weber (1930) argued that the Protestant work ethic facilitated the growth of capitalism in Northern Europe and the United States. A similar line of argument was further developed some years later by Dore (1965), in his study on "the legacy of Tokugawa education".

Perhaps the most influential book concerned with the study of Japanese companies per se published in English in this early period was Abegglen's "The Japanese Factory" (1958), based on research conducted during the mid 1950s, when Japan's post-war recovery was well underway. In line with the climate of the time, Abegglen emphasised the importance of tradition in

Japanese industrial organisation, arguing that Japanese industry had retained an essentially feudal system of relationships. However, where Abegglen broke new ground was in arguing that this "feudal" system, far from being a negative trait that should be uprooted, had facilitated Japan's industrialisation, and was a viable alternative to the "Western" system. It is ironic that two of the main features identified by Abegglen as deriving from"traditional" Japanese practice - lifetime employment and pay by seniority - which, thanks to Abegglen, became well known as defining features of "the Japanese Employment System", had in fact only become firmly established a short time before he undertook his research.

Published just before Japan's post war economic boom began in 1959, Abegglen's positive evaluation of "traditional" Japanese management practice fed into the new mood of the sixties, and a swing within Japan towards extolling the virtues of Japan's "unique" management style - *Nihonteki keiei.* The most notable Japanese language contribution to this trend is the work of Hazama (1963), who became the main exponent within Japanese academia of a theory of Japanese management as based on "familism", or the inter-personal relationships in the Japanese *ie*.

The late fifties and early sixties in Japan also saw the rise to prominence of the literary genre of *sarariiman shōsetsu*, or businessman novels. In contrast to academic writing of the period, which tends to stress harmony within the enterprise as a distinctively Japanese characteristic, these novels tend to focus on conflicts and struggles, within as well as between corporations. In this sense they run counter to the emerging discourse of "Japanese management". However, they also continue a much older trend to

depict the businessman as a modern day corporate warrior,[11] the new samurai of Japan,[12] thus contributing to the related discourse of the Japanese employee as driven by culturally determined motives, fundamentally different from those of his counterparts in "the West".

Some English language writers in the sixties continued to take a critical view of "traditional" Japanese practice as maladapted to the demands of modern industrial society (M. Yoshino: 1968, esp. 117-222), and predicted increasing convergence with patterns of social organisation in the industrialised "West" (Bennett 1967). However, an increasing number of non-Japanese commentators followed Abegglen in arguing that practices based on Japanese traditions were, on the contrary, conducive to rapid modernisation, and a type of management which had much to do with Japan's successful economic recovery (see, for example, Ballon 1968, 1969). Unfortunately, this view of Japanese "tradition" tended to be rather uncritical, and failed to consider the issues of the way in which a particular discourse of tradition had developed, or the way in which tradition could be creatively mobilised in the service of industrial enterprises. These questions were taken up by Marshall (1967) in a history of the ideology of the business elite in Japan, but Marshall's careful analysis of the way in which a distinctive business ideology emerged in Japan seems to have gone largely unheeded by his contemporaries.

The great explosion of writing on Japanese society in general, and Japanese companies in particular, did not occur until the 1970s, also the

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[11] See Mulhern, 1991, for an overview of the development and characteristics of this genre.

[12] Also an analogy drawn by Vogel (1971:5).

decade which saw the peak of *nihonjinron* [13]type publications on Japanese uniqueness (K. Yoshino 1992:2). Appropriately enough, the decade opened with the publication of the text that has subsequently had the greatest influence in shaping the debate on Japan: Nakane's Japanese Society (1970).

Nakane's analysis of Japanese society stresses the importance of small groups, and for this reason is widely referred to as "the group model". As did Hazama (1963), Nakane draws parallels between the Japanese *ie*, and large companies in Japan, but goes further by arguing that the *ie* is the fundamental unit of Japanese social structure, and provides the model for all group organisation in Japan (Nakane 1970). Nakane's particular contribution to this discourse of Japanese society was to articulate it for a foreign audience, more specifically an audience of British social anthropologists, in the form of a model with clear structural principles, that is, within the terms of British structural-functionalism.

The notion of the *ie* is central both to Nakane's work and to that of her Japanese academic antecedents, and is worth exploring in some detail before considering Nakane's ideas in greater depth. The word *ie* refers both to the house itself and to the group of people who live in it. Membership in the *ie*, is based on residence rather than kinship, that is, its members are those who ordinarily reside together in one house, although some of them may be absent at any given time, for example for seasonal work. The *ie* is continuous over time, regardless of shifting group composition, and includes not only the living members, but also the dead ancestors and, notionally, the unborn. The continuity of the *ie* is held

[13] *Nihonjinron*, literally, writing on the Japanese, has become the commonly used generic term for popularist writing promoting the view of Japan as unique and fundamentally different from "the West".

to be very important, but succession need not necessarily be by kinship. The preferred form of succession is by the eldest son,[14] but if no suitable son is available, another successor, often a son-in-law, may be adopted by the household head. Only one person can inherit the *ie*, and no-one can be a member of more then one *ie*, so non-inheriting children have to leave the *ie* on marriage.

Relations within the *ie* are close-knit and hierarchical. Younger defer to older, as marked by a kinship terminology that distinguishes between older and younger siblings in both terms of address and terms of reference. The household head, usually male, although widows may also head households, exercises authority over the other members of the *ie*.[15] Relations among members of the same *ie* have priority over relations with members of different *ie*, regardless of biological kinship. The weakest position in the household is that occupied by the new entrant - usually the new bride (*yome*), but also on occasion the new husband, where the *ie* has no sons and is adopting a son-in-law. In this case the son-in-law is termed the *muko yōshi*, a status thought of to be highly unenviable, since it reverses the usual hierarchical relations between the sexes by placing the man in the weaker position.

In the more usual case of the *yome*, her first task on marriage is to learn the ways of her new *ie*. If she fails at this task, she may be sent back to her natal *ie*.[16] This type of divorce is seen as a household matter, and may be

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[14] This was the normal pattern of inheritance as encoded by Meiji law, although in pre-Meiji Japan inheritance patterns had varied somewhat from region to region. Under legislation enacted by the Occupation all children have equal inheritance rights, but in practice eldest son inheritance continues to be widespread.

[15] The legal basis for this has been removed under the post-war constitution

[16] Such an outcome of marriage is seen as a disgrace to the family of the returned bride, and the prospects of remarriage for the woman, or indeed any divorced woman in Japan, are not good.

decided by the husband's parents rather than by the husband himself. The *yome* is effectively apprenticed to her mother-in-law in the early years of her marriage, and dependent on the latter's approval to maintain her own position in the household. Although the relationship between these two women may become a warm and affectionate one over the years, the stereotype of the mother-in-law - *yome* relationship in Japan is one of tension and barely suppressed mutual antagonism.

This, at least, is the normative description of the *ie*, and the one that would be accepted by most Japanese people. However, the extent to which this constitutes an accurate description of residence patterns, past or present, is open to question. As far as the present is concerned, it is generally recognised that the composition of the average Japanese household has changed considerably since the war, with increased urbanisation and cramped housing conditions in cities leading to a decline in three generation households. And if we trace the history of the *ie* back before the war, we find that this particular pattern of *ie* organisation was only enshrined as the norm in the late nineteenth century, during the Meiji restoration. Although the *ie* existed throughout Japan prior to this time, there was considerable regional variation in its structure, particularly in patterns of succession, with the pattern described by Nakane more accurate for North-Eastern than for Western Japan.[17] The notion of the "traditional" Japanese *ie* is therefore perhaps best understood as a discourse in terms of which actual household relations are framed and may

[17] Bachnik (1983) has argued that what is important in the *ie* in any case is not actual kinship relations at all, but position, with the crucial positions being those of household head and mistress of the house, and their respective successors. As long as these positions are filled, there may be a great deal of flexibility and variation in the actual composition of the *ie*, with a constant sorting process between the temporary members (everyone outside these four positions) and those occupying the four permanent positions within the *ie*.

be assessed and criticised, and not as a description of actual living conditions, past or present.

For Nakane, in any case, the importance of the *ie* is not in its accuracy as a description of actual residential arrangements, but in its properties as exemplar of the archetypical Japanese group. She argues that in this sense "the concept of the *ie* still persists in modern contexts." (Nakane 1970: 8). Drawing on her fieldwork in India as well as her knowledge of Japanese society, Nakane identifies two bases of group affiliation: "attribute", defined as an individual's particular qualities, whether acquired by birth or by achievement (for example caste in the Indian context) and "frame", that is "a locality, an institution or a particular relationship which binds a set of individuals into a group" (Nakane 1970: 1). According to Nakane, the latter is generally stressed in Japan, which leads to an individual's sense of identity being based on the group to which he or she belongs rather than on his or her personal characteristics, abilities or achievements. Nakane writes: "Such group consciousness and orientation fosters the strength of an institution and the institutional unit...is in fact the basis of Japanese social organisation" (Nakane 1970: 3). Nakane also argues that Japanese inter-personal relationships are generally structured along vertical lines, so that superior-inferior relationships are strong, while horizontal relationships between equals are weak. Japanese society is thus composed of vertically organised groups, with strong distinctions between insiders and outsiders, and weak links between groups.

As far as Japanese companies are concerned, Nakane's model provides a simple framework within which both the logic and the persistence of the Japanese employment system can be understood. Lifetime employment and enterprise unionism both tend to emphasise in-group links within the

company, and to minimise links between members of different companies. The preference for seniority pay rather than performance related pay is logically consistent with a system of vertical ranking where age is one of the principal criteria of rank. But most important of all is the tendency for the company to encompass all aspects of its members' lives. Nakane points out in this connection the general practice for companies to offer their employees extremely comprehensive social welfare packages. She also draws an analogy between the manner in which new company entrants are received into the company and the entry of a new *yome* or *muko yōshi* into the *ie* (Nakane 1970:14).[18] Nakane argues therefore that, "a company is conceived of as an *ie*, all its employees qualifying as members of the household, with the employer at its head" (Nakane 1970:8).

Nakane's broad brush approach, seeing Japanese companies as epitomising the basic features of Japanese social structure, was soon supplemented by the first detailed, fieldwork based ethnographies of Japanese companies (Cole 1971; Dore 1973; Rohlen 1974; and Clark 1979). [19] These early works were on the whole concerned to use their particular case study to build up a picture of employment in Japan, implicitly or explicitly compared with conditions experienced in the USA or Great Britain. They all focused on male, full-time employees, thus producing a highly gendered view of the workplace, and of the discourse of employment,[20] and they mostly

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[18]There are also some important differences in the ways in which members leave and join *ie* and company, particularly for women. In the company, women are generally thought to join on a temporary basis, and rarely achieve a senior position. However, except in cases of divorce, the *yome* joins the household permanently, achieving the senior position of mistress of the *ie* in time. These differences are not dealt with by Nakane, for whom, as argued below, the analogy between company and *ie* remains on a very abstract level.

[19]Abegglen's research had been conducted on the basis of interviews undertaken at nineteen large and thirty-four small factories spread throughout Japan (Abegglen 1958:x).

[20]See Moore (1988) for a detailed discussion of problems associated with the general representation of women and women's experiences in the anthropology of this era.

concentrated on large companies, although Cole did include fieldwork at a medium-sized company as well.[21]

This emphasis on the differences between Japan on the one hand and the United States and Western Europe on the other, coupled with the concern to build up a generally applicable picture of Japanese companies and the tendency to focus exclusively on the way work was represented by and for male employees, led these works to reinforce, in general terms, an idealised model of Japanese employment as characterised by lifetime employment, seniority pay, and enterprise unionism. These writers also noted the close involvement of employees with each other and with their company, stretching beyond the limits of the workplace; and the "in-groupness" of the company, although, with the exception of Rohlen, they are cautious about the use of words like "harmony".[22] Cole and Clark both note the importance of competition within the company, and the endemic inter-personal conflicts, but also tell us that a strong value was placed on preserving at least an appearance of "good human relations" (Clark 1979: 200).

Although in some ways these early fieldwork accounts thus tend to bolster the discourse of a unique Japanese style of company organisation, they also furnish some of the earliest critiques of this discourse. Clark, for instance, notes the importance of the dual economy, in which only a minority of the

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[21]In Japanese government publications large companies are defined as having more than 1,000 employees.The distinction is important, as employment conditions in Japan vary depending on the size of company, as will be explored in greater detail below. Clark's fieldwork was conducted at an expanding company that passed the 1,000 mark in the year following his departure. However, the figure of 1,000 is a useful benchmark rather than an absolute cut-off point, and the company where Clark did his fieldwork approximated conditions at a large company closely enough to be included under that rubric.

[22]Of these classic ethnographies, Rohlen's is the least critical of management ideology, and takes as its title the motto of the company he studied, "For Harmony and Strength".

Japanese workforce, the male full-time employees of large companies, enjoy the idealised description of "Japanese employment" given above, while their counterparts in smaller enterprises, as well as women and part-time or temporary employees are largely excluded from its benefits. He also notes that even among the employee elite a degree of mobility can be observed, but this is mostly among the younger employees, so that age also plays an important role in the degree to which "lifetime employment" constitutes an apt description of employee expectations, or commitment (Clark 1979: 186-7).

Both Clark and Cole are also critical of the notion of 'familism" as applied to Japanese companies, with Cole pointing out that this is an analogy "promoted by Japanese management" and warning that "this analogy diverts the observer from the actual relationships within the Japanese firm" (Cole 1971:12). Clark traces the historical development of the ideology of familism, and concludes by remarking that the "firm as family" analogy is no longer often made, perhaps because of the changes in the Japanese family itself (Clark 1979:41).

Clark is joined by Dore (1973) in rejecting the notion that current Japanese employment practices arose in any simple and direct way from traditional cultural norms. Dore instead puts forward the hypothesis that many of the practices commonly taken to be distinctively Japanese have arisen from Japan's status as a late-developing nation, and argues that other industrial nations may converge towards the Japanese pattern in some respects.

By the end of the 1970s, Japanese companies had gained a high profile, both in terms of their role in the world economy and in the volume of writing, academic and otherwise, devoted to them. Japan had weathered the

oil shock of 1973,[23] and although she was now enjoying slower rates of growth than she had during the post-war boom years, her economy continued to grow faster than that of her competitors. Against this background, an American professor, Ezra Vogel, of Harvard University, who had already written extensively on urban Japan, arguing for the continuing importance of the notion of the *ie* in the guise of the modern company, with the *sarariiman* as the modern samurai (Vogel 1963), published a deliberately polemical work entitled "Japan as Number One"(1979). In this work, Vogel urged Americans to learn from Japan's success in areas covering not only business, but also democracy; education; communitarian values; dissemination of knowledge; crime; and welfare. Translated into Japanese, the book quickly became a best-seller on both sides of the Pacific.

Vogel set the tone for a new phase in writing on Japan, the "Learn from Japan" boom, which took hold in the United States in the 1980s with the publication of works such as "Theory Z" (Ouchi 1981) and "The Art of Japanese Management" (Pascale and Athos 1981). These populist works project a very oversimplified view of employment conditions in Japan, delineating the by then commonly known features of lifetime employment, pay by seniority and enterprise unionism, but placing the emphasis on the assumed "intimacy" of Japanese corporate relations (Ouchi 1981:8), with the creation of a feeling of involvement of all employees of whatever rank in the company's fortunes, through practices such as quality-control circles or consensus-based decision making. This sense of involvement is also stressed in various management-authored texts on Japanese companies

[23]Oil imports to Japan were briefly cut off during an international dispute involving the middle-eastern oil-producing countries in 1973, causing a recession in Japan in 1973-4. Although the economic effects of this were short-lived, the episode had a profound psychological impact on the Japanese, as it brought home the extent of their dependency on energy imports, and consequent vulnerability.

published in English in the 1980s. For example, in one of the best-sellers of this genre, Morita, co-founder of Sony, stating that "the most important mission for a Japanese manager is to... create a familylike feeling within the corporation, a feeling that employees and managers share the same fate." (1987:130).

However, at the same time that books praising Japanese management were hitting the best-seller lists, more critical voices were also making themselves heard. In the populist vein, Woronoff produced a veritable deluge of books in the 1980s, criticising almost every conceivable aspect of Japanese employment practice, with titles such as "Japan's Wasted Workers"(1982). And in Japan, a journalist produced a highly critical account of work and dormitory life for temporary workers on the Toyota assembly line, which was in also translated into English (Kamata 1982).

In a more academic vein, critiques were made of Nakane's work, now commonly renamed "the group model". [24] Befu argued that this model failed to account for a number of important aspects of Japanese society. Most importantly, the notion of society as comprised of vertically organised groups in competition with each other and with a strong in-group out-group distinction, cannot, Befu argues, explain the existence of conflict and competition within groups; the behaviour of individuals isolated from groups; or relations between groups. Befu also criticised Nakane for the ahistoricity of her work, and for her failure to see the exploitative aspects of paternalism. His conclusion is that her model accounts for the ideals of Japanese society, but not the reality, a distinction he equates with the

[24]Nakane herself objects to this term, but as it is the most widely used appellation of her work I have retained it in this thesis.

Japanese terms *tatemae* (for ideals) and *honne* (for reality).[25] Befu argues that it is because Nakane's "group model" is in fact a reflection of *tatemae* that it emphasises consensus and harmony - which is the face that groups are supposed to present to outsiders - and neglects *honne*, thus underestimating the importance of self-interest and conflict within groups.

Befu attempts to resolve these theoretical difficulties by focusing on the individual placed at the centre of a unique personal network rather than viewed as a member of a single hierarchically organised group. The personal connections that create a network may be established for example on the basis of attendance at a common University or high school, or even on the basis of originating from the same area of Japan. Thus two graduates of Tokyo University who join different companies may maintain or renew contact, and can use this contact both to further their own self-interest and to promote links between their respective companies. In this way, we can account for links between organisations which are seen in Nakane's model as entirely self-contained and isolated from each other. And a means of understanding conflict within organisations is also offered by the depiction of individuals as constantly manouevring to forward their own interests within the organisation, in competition with their colleagues. However, Befu's work is vulnerable to the criticism levelled at transactionalism in general, with which his approach has much in common, that individual actions and choices are overemphasised in his model, with insufficient consideration given to the constraints within which these choices are made.[26]

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[25]This gloss of the meanings of *tatemae* and *honne* is rather simplistic and misleading, as will be explored in greater detail below.

[26]See Barth (1966) for an example of the transactionalist approach, and Asad (1972) for a critique of this approach.

The notion of the group model as *tatemae*, a statement of ideals that fails to reflect reality, or in Marxist terms, a form of false consciousness, is explored further by Mouer and Sugimoto (1981, 1986). They suggest that there are two basic schools of thought on Japanese society: one that portrays Japan as group-oriented, consensual and homogeneous, which they term "the great tradition" and which corresponds to what has been described above as the culturalist position, and another that is Marxist-based and concerned with conflict, "the little tradition".

Mouer and Sugimoto point out that although both perspectives are represented in Japanese language academic texts, in English language texts the former is overwhelmingly dominant. They attribute this in part to the compared to Western Europe and America established position of Marxist scholarship in Japan, and in part owing to a variety of factors tending to filter the image of Japan presented to the outside world. In the latter category they note a romanticist tendency for non-Japanese observers to seek in Japan that which is "traditional" and different from the West; a conscious effort on the part of Japanese government agencies to promote the consensual perspective (for example through funding the translation of works such as that of Nakane's while withholding funds for the translation of works by leftist scholars); and the tendency for foreign researchers with a less than perfect command of the language to be dependent on local elites for translation and the provision of information and explanation. They suggest therefore that the model of Japan as consensual and group-oriented may be a form of *tatemae*, and a reflection of the interests of a power-holding elite.

> From this perspective, the Japanese are not seen as working actively or positively to promote consensus, but as passively responding to the ideological insistence of those in positions of authority...."groupism" of the "group model"...[may be]...an ideology, albeit a very successfully propagated one, and that as such it presents an example of how the Japanese elite control or manipulate the rest of society.
>
> (Mouer and Sugimoto 1981: 18)

Mouer and Sugimoto's suggested alternative approach is to establish a "multi-dimensional stratification model". This would "highlight the ways in which variation in behaviour and thought occurs according to gender, age, occupation, education, spatial location and other factors" and would also incorporate Befu's theories of social exchange (Mouer and Sugimoto 1981: 17).

More specific criticism of the depiction of Japanese management as a unique, culturally-based, system came in the latter part of the decade from Koike, a Japanese economist (1988). Koike argued that the representation of the Japanese employment system as unique, and fundamentally different from that of the West, is exaggerated. He points out that this implies a caricature of company organisation in the West as offering no job security, lacking long-serving employees, and with wage differentials solely on the basis of merit rather than age or length of service. In fact, Koike argues, a substantial proportion of white-collar employees in the EEC and the USA stay with the same firm for five years or more, (about 70 per cent in France and West Germany in 1972), and in the USA, according to a survey conducted in 1966, a higher proportion of male employees had fifteen or more years service with the same firm as compared with the Japanese workforce (if firms of all sizes are included in the Japanese sample). Koike also suggests that parallels to the Japanese Enterprise

Unions may be found in German works councils and French enterprise committees, and produces evidence that pay by seniority may be less a unique feature of Japan's company organisation than a characteristic of pay structures for white-collar workers world-wide which has, in Japan, been extended to cover blue-collar workers, a development he terms "white-collarization" (Koike 1983 : 29 - 60). For Koike, the most distinctive aspect of Japanese company organisation is the pattern of training within the company, which is orientated to acquiring skills that are specific to that company and not easily transferred, thus encouraging a pattern of long-term employment within a single enterprise.[27]

In the work of Befu, Mouer and Sugimoto, and Koike, we find three distinct attempts to re-assess the dominant representation of Japanese employment relations, from the point of view of social exchange theory; social stratification theory; and a more general economics-based approach. But despite their obvious differences, these three contributions share a number of common threads. Firstly, they are all written in reaction to the earlier in inception, but still continuing, trend to emphasise the differences between Japan and "the West". All three attempt, instead, to place Japanese society and Japanese institutions within a more general, internationally applicable framework.

Secondly, all three are model-based, that is, they attempt to construct a general theoretical framework on an abstract level, with little reference to particular cases. This is in large part a consequence of the fact that none of them is based on fieldwork. Thirdly, all three share the premise that the popular view of a unique, culturally-based Japanese employment system is

[27]This argument is similar to that advanced by Dore in his "late development" hypothesis outlined above.

an illusion, a statement of ideals that can be disproved by reference to an empirical, observable, reality.

The biggest problem with this approach is that it takes little or no account of how institutions such as Japanese companies appear to those who are closely involved with them. At worst, the viewpoint of those most intimately concerned is simply dismissed, a misconception that can be rectified by the trained social scientist. Koike, for example, says of Abegglen's work that "his ... portrayal of permanent employment and seniority wages simply reflected how the Japanese themselves at that time perceived them", going on in a later paragraph to depict the belief that permanent employment and seniority wages are "features peculiar to Japan" as "based on nothing more than legends unsupported by empirical evidence" (Koike 1988:6-7).

All this begs the question of how the postulated "false consciousness" of the group model and related accounts stressing in-groupness and the importance of consensus and harmony in Japanese companies have taken hold. Mouer and Sugimoto (1981, 1986) argue that information about Japan is filtered in translation, but even so, they concede that the "great tradition" of consensus predominates in Japanese language texts as well as foreign language ones. Why should this be so?

By the late 1980s, then, debate on employment in Japan seemed locked into an unwinnable, and increasingly abstract argument between those who favoured a relativistic "culturalist" position, identified with Nakane, the populist *nihonjinron* writers, and, perhaps unfairly, the discipline of anthropology; and those who favoured a more universalist approach, often associated with economics. I characterise this argument as unwinnable

because the two sides seem in fact to be discussing quite different things: on the one hand a system of ideals, and on the other hand observable behaviour, with little consideration of how the two might interact, or (since the early ethnographies of the 1970s) of how it might all appear to, or be interpreted by, the protagonists.

However a different kind of approach also began to appear in the 1980s in the writings of Plath (1980, 1983). Suspicious of texts that showed stereotypical salarymen and housewives endlessly going through their paces,[28] Plath sought to take a less monolithic approach. In Long Engagements (1980), Plath transcribed a number of self-related individual life histories, comparing them with accounts in literature showing analogous dilemmas, and adducing his own comments to each. The result is a fascinating account that restores a sense of the dilemmas and ambiguities faced by individuals within Japanese society that is absent from more abstract theoretical models. And in Work and Lifecourse in Japan (1983), Plath brings together a collection of articles showing some of the variety of work experiences in Japanese society.

In the 1990s there has been a continued exploration of areas of working life in Japan beyond the ideal type represented by the male full-time employees of large companies. Women's employment experiences, looked at in an office context by McLendon in the collection edited by Plath in 1983, have been examined in general terms by Saso (1990) and Lam (1992). Kondo (1990) gives a rich and detailed fieldwork-based account of part-time women employees in a small urban confectionery factory. Lo (1990) outlines two contrasting experiences of women employed in offices and in

[28]Plath wrote that "For more than a generation in sociological thinking, Japan has been populated by replicas of the Organization Man and his mate, the Professional Housewife" (1983:4)

factories, while Roberts (1994) gives us a case study of blue collar women working as full-time employees in the garments manufacturing industry, and Creighton, writing a little earlier, (1988) includes a section on women's employment in the retail sector in her analysis of three of Japan's leading department stores.

A different kind of work experience, that of employment by a (at that time) nationalised industry, is examined by Noguchi (1990) in his account of working at a small station on the Japan National Railways (JNR) network. Noguchi also re-examines critically the use of the family metaphor within the JNR, concluding that is largely a management based ideology. The use of the *ie* as metaphor is also explored by Kondo, who takes the view that, in the factory where she conducted her research, this metaphor is an area of contestation, used by both the factory owner and the employees to articulate and justify opposed viewpoints.

Kondo also provides narratives of some employees' lives showing a range of ways of relating to work and to the company, and the ways in which these vary depending on generation and gender. She examines the way in which work may be used as a pathway to maturity, serving to polish the self and create a complete person (*ichininmae*) (Kondo 1990:235). And she challenges the compartmentalisation of women's and men's lives into domestic- versus work-based spheres, arguing that paid work may be, for married women part-timers, an index of their commitment to their own household.

In these more recent published texts on Japanese companies a shift in perspective is evident that mirrors trends in anthropology as a whole. Kondo explicitly acknowledges her debt to the anthropologist Geertz, and

his interpretative approach, moving away from an externally imposed, model-based analysis, towards a consideration of culture as a system of meanings. The emphasis accordingly shifts towards an attempt to convey the viewpoints of those involved, along the lines explored by Plath in the nineteen-eighties.

Another important aspect of Kondo's work that shows the influence of more general current anthropological thinking is a rejection of positivism, the search for an "irreducible essence", and her insistence that "meaning can never be fixed", but is constantly recreated, ever shifting and dependent on context (Kondo 1990: 35-36).[29] From this standpoint, Kondo's interest is to explore the ways in which various conceptual categories are constructed, notably notions of selfhood, which form the focus of her work. Other categories she explores are the *ie*, as mentioned above, and the triad of related pairs of terms: *omote* (front, or surface)and *ura* (back, or underneath), *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside), and *tatemae* (appearances, how things are supposed to be)and *honne*. ("real" feelings). In this, her work links up with that of Doi, a Japanese psychologist who has written a best-seller on *omote* and *ura* (1985), as well as that of other anthropologists currently writing on Japan. Notable here are Hendry (1987, 1993) and Bachnik's work on the importance of the notions of inside and outside in constructing meaning in Japan (Bachnik and Quinn 1994). This approach, which seeks to examine the varying ways in which Japanese people represent the world and the society in which they live, and rejects the positivist search for an essential core beneath the layers of representation, or wrapping, links back again with wider theoretical concerns in anthropology as a whole, in particular notions of discourse.

[29]The main theoretical influence Kondo cites in this context is that of Derrida.

1.3 Notions of Discourse

First employed in linguistics, the notion of discourse has also been widely used by philosophers and anthropologists. However, a clear, commonly agreed definition of "discourse" is elusive. Geertz, discussing the notion of culture, commented that exciting new intellectual ideas are often seized upon in this way, in the process becoming so stretched in meaning as to lose all coherence. There then follows a "cutting...down to size" in which the idea in question is given a sharper focus, and a narrower range of application (Geertz 1973: 4-5). This description of the way in which new ideas appear, enlarge and subsequently contract in meaning seems very apt where the notion of discourse is concerned.

In "An Introduction to discourse analysis", written for students of linguistics, Coulthard (1985) defines it as "situated speech" - in itself a vague enough term - but then goes on to point out that even this definition is not universally accepted by linguists. Some would extend its meaning to include the written word, while others would use a different term altogether (pragmatics) to describe the same phenomenon. Within the field of anthropology, the use of the term has been stretched still further. Geertz (1973) uses the term "social discourse" to cover the unspoken realm of actions as well as speech and writing , while Parkin notes that some anthropologists see "society itself as discourse" (Parkin 1984: 348).

But perhaps the most influential writer on the notion of discourse is Foucault, who, in "The History of Sexuality"(1978), contrasts a positivist approach with one based on discourse:

> The central issue...is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, whether one formulates prohibitions or permissions, whether one asserts its importance or denies its effects, or whether one refines the words one uses to designate it; but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the

> positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all "discursive fact," the way in which sex is "put into discourse." Hence, too, my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates...finally the essential aim will not be to determine whether these discursive productions and these effects of power lead one to formulate the truth about sex, or on the contrary falsehoods designed to conceal that truth, but rather to bring out the "will to knowledge" that serves as both their support and their instrument.
>
> (Foucault 1978: 11-12)[30]

For Foucault, then, there is an intimate connection between discourse, power and knowledge. The way in which these three elements interact has also been explored by Bloch (1974, 1975), in his work on political speech and oratory, and by Bourdieu (1977).

Bloch (1974, 1975) contrasts formalised and informalised speech, arguing that formalised speech is impoverished, as it makes only a limited range of linguistic forms available. Syntax, vocabulary, and even the illustrations that may be used to make a point are all restricted, and the sequence of the discourse becomes highly predictable, with little or no scope for challenge. Bloch therefore suggests that formalised language is in effect both an expression of power and a form of social control. The irony of this, as Bloch notes, is that by using this type of language the speaker also loses "his own freedom of manipulation" (Bloch 1974: 64), and therefore those in authority need to switch back and forth between formalised and everyday speech in order to manoeuvre and manipulate the situation in which they find themselves.[31]

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[30]The original French text, "La volonte du savoir" was published in 1976, but the quote here is taken from the English translation, published in 1978.

[31]This switching back and forth is also characteristic of the way in which *tatemae* and *honne* are often used in Japan. The ability to switch back and forth between *tatemae* and *honne*, or the analogous pair of terms, *omote* and *ura*, as appropriate, and to read the way in which other people switch, is considered an index of maturity in Japan, and has been commented on by a number of writers including Doi (1986); Tobin (1992) and Bachnik (1992).

Bourdieu (1977) also links official discourse to the exercise of power, and suggests that it may be used as a means of making private interests appear public and legitimate.[32] In addition, Bourdieu raises the question of the role of gender in discourse. In the Kabyle case, he makes the point both that official discourse tends to be male, and unofficial female; and also that the public discourse that the anthropologist hears therefore tends to be male. This caveat has particular resonance when considering the official discourse of Japanese companies, which, as already noted, is very much male-gendered.

However, Bourdieu puts us on our guard concerning an excessive reliance on discourse as the object of study, particularly informant-anthropologist discourse, which, as he points out, has a number of pitfalls:

> Insofar as it is a discourse of familiarity, it leaves unsaid all that goes without saying... Insofar as it is an outsider-oriented discourse it tends to exclude all direct reference to particular cases...[but] ... the subtlest pitfall lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of rules...to express a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles.
>
> (Bourdieu 1977:18-19)

In other words, what the ethnographer is told excludes large areas assumed to be common sense, and is also stated in very general, normative terms. Bourdieu therefore argues that a study of discourse tends to exclude precisely what the ethnographer ought to be studying: the unspoken area of what is understood, which Bourdieu terms practice, or the habitus.

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[32] The particular case which Bourdieu was considering was marriage patterns among the Kabyle. The preferred pattern was said to be patrilineal parallel cousin marriage, but, given the amount of intermarriage within a small community, kinship links between husband and wife could often be traced either through the mothers or fathers of the spouses. Bourdieu suggests that in some cases initial unofficial manouevring with a view to marriage might take place through the female kinship links, but this would then be made to appear legitimate in terms of the preferred marriage pattern by re-formulating the connection between the two spouses in terms of their patrilineal links once the proposed marriage entered the public domain (Bourdieu 1977: 38 - 43).

However, Bourdieu's objections to a discourse-based approach may perhaps be overcome by contrasting the various sorts of discourse that the ethnographer encounters, and by enlarging the notion of discourse to include actions, and the area of the non-verbal. This would avoid the pitfalls of resorting to the notion of an unspoken habitus that must be reconstructed by the ethnographer.

1.4 Discourse and "the Japanese company"

An approach based on discourse, as briefly outlined above, has wide-ranging implications for the study of Japanese companies. At the most general level, by shifting the object of study away from a search for the "truth" about Japanese companies, and towards an exploration of the ways in which the notions such as "the Japanese company", "Japanese management", or "the Japanese employee" are constructed and contested, using Foucault's ideas offers us a way out of the impasse that the debate about Japanese companies had fallen into by the 1980s.

Moving to an examination of some the factors influencing the ways in which the above notions may be constructed differently by different people and in different contexts, the contrast drawn by Bourdieu between official and unofficial discourse finds resonances in the Japanese terms *tatemae* and *honne*, and the related pairs of terms *soto* and *uchi* and *omote* and *ura*. For the sake of brevity, the terms *tatemae* and *honne* have been glossed above as appearances versus real feelings. However, they are much richer in meaning than this brief definition suggests. For the Japanese, the terms *tatemae* and *honne* evoke different types of discourse, appropriate to different contexts. *Tatemae* is associated with the official domain, it is public and expresses generally accepted principles of how things ought to be. *Honne*, on the other hand, is unofficial, private, and

may often expressly centre on the individual, and his or her aspirations. They are also suggestive of two other pairs of linked terms in Japanese: *omote* (surface, outside, exterior) and *ura* (back, that which lies behind the surface); and *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside).

As emphasised by Kondo (1990:31) and Bachnik (1992, 1994) the meanings of these terms are relative and vary according to context. For example, Bachnik points out that the boundary between inside and outside is always shifting, so that even within a household, a visitor may sometimes be treated as an insider, and at other times as an outsider, depending on who else is present (Bachnik 1992). To take the example of a Japanese company, a complex set of terms for different types of employees described in Chapter Two denote degrees of membership, or insider-status, within the company, so that no clear boundary can be drawn between inside and outside the company. The picture is further complicated by the existence of informal groupings based on age, gender, and personal friendships, as well as the more formal divisions of work groups and ranking within the company. Nor is any individual's place on the inside-outside axis permanently fixed - depending on context, the same person may be treated as relatively an outsider or relatively an insider.[33]

It would also be misleading to consider these paired terms as simple pairs of opposites, rather they are in a complex relationship of mutual dependency. Doi emphasises this point when he argues that *omote* does not merely conceal, but may indeed express the *ura* (Doi 1985:26). Certainly in Doi's terms it would be a mistake to try to remove the surface in order to reveal an inner essence, for him the one is dependent on the other, and has no

[33]Bachnik has explored this kind of shifting vis-a-vis guests in a Japanese household (Bachnik 1992).

separate existence. Hendry (1993) also makes the point that the surface "wrapping" that is so pervasive in both the material and the social domains in Japanese culture is in itself important and worthy of analysis, while the quest for "essences" may prove elusive.

As far as the paired terms *tatemae-honne*, *omote-ura*, and *soto-uchi* are concerned, both Bachnik and Kondo argue that to view the *honne, ura, uchi* triad as referring to some sort of fixed essence is inherently misleading. Rather, they see these terms as axes which serve to index social interactions in Japan. Kondo perhaps sums up this position most succinctly when she writes that these terms are:

> contextually constructed, shifting, and therefore referentially empty; they are *not* dualistic, essentialist categories. Using these terms invokes a complex series of gradations along a scale of detachment and engagement, distance and intimacy, formality and informality....The tension between the two poles is never completely resolved.
>
> (Kondo 1990:31)

The *tatemae, omote, soto* triad thus is situated at the pole of detachment, distance, and formality, while the *honne, ura, uchi* triad is situated at the pole of engagement, intimacy and informality. For the Japanese, the distinction between the two triads is summed up by the outside/inside opposition, so that insofar as these terms link in with different discourses the first set is associated with a public context and outsider-orientated discourse, while the second is private, and insider-orientated.

However, there is not always a perfect match between inside, private and informal. This can be seen particularly clearly in the case of the company, where there are some formal occasions that involve only company insiders, for example the company sports day, described below in Chapter Ten. And, as analysed further in Chapter Ten, such events may embody both private and public agendas, with the formal order of the day

orchestrated by company management, while individual employees use the event for more personal ends.

The framework used in this thesis employs the emic categories of *tatemae/honne, omote/ura,* and *soto/uchi,* but also seeks to deconstruct these notions into their main semantic components: formal versus informal; official versus unofficial; outsider-orientated versus insider-orientated; and public versus private, in order to highlight and problematise the way in which these elements cross-cut each other. In breaking down the Japanese terms in this way, it is also hoped to incorporate broader anthropological perspectives suggested by the work of Bloch and Bourdieu, and ultimately to build up a picture of the various overlapping discourses that constitute, or undermine, notions such as "the Japanese company" and "the Japanese employee".

1.5 Aims and trajectory of this thesis

In this thesis, therefore, a range of discourses of employment, adulthood, maturity and company-employee relations, are considered in the context of a single large Japanese company, a chain store in which I worked as a part-time employee for one year (1990-1991). A kaleidoscopic picture is thus built up of the way in which one particular company intersects with the lives of its employees and seeks to situate itself in the wider context of Japanese society. The aim is to critically examine both representations of the company, for example that of the company as lifetime employer, enveloping its employees; and also representations of archetypal employees: the dedicated salaryman, the young female employee filling in time before marriage, and the mature woman working for "pin money". In this context, the ways in which gender and generation are constructed in Japan will also be examined.

This shift away from a positivist, company-centred approach to one in which a variety of discourses, both public and private, company- and individual-centred are considered, enables a consideration of areas often neglected in studies of Japanese companies. It also gives a voice to experiences and perspectives that are suppressed in the officialised company discourse, and enables a reassessment of the role of large companies in Japanese society and their relationship with their employees. One major theme is the role of large companies in Japan in the life course of their employees, and particularly in mediating the transition to adulthood and in articulating the subsequent acquisition of maturity among their employees, both male and female. At stake here are competing, shifting definitions of adulthood and maturity in Japan, in a context in which a labour shortage of new graduate recruits forced large companies to repackage themselves to address concerns raised by popular youth culture. In this sense the issues raised are relevant to wider debates on material culture and consumption (Miller 1987; Bourdieu 1979). Gender is another of the main themes addressed: normative life-courses for men and women in Japan are described and analysed, and compared with individual narratives.

In terms of the way the thesis has been structured, another major theoretical theme, that of notions of *soto* and *uchi*, outside and inside, has been used to order the material presented along a continuum moving from an outside perspective inwards. This chapter has discussed in some detail the officialised discourse of Japanese employment in both academia and popular culture, and the depiction of the company as a powerful, but undifferentiated entity, enveloping the lives of its equally anonymous employees. In Chapter Two this view of Japanese companies as essentially

homogeneous is challenged through a specific, historically situated, account of the retail sector in Japan and the particular patterns of employment with which it is associated. This is followed in Chapter Three by a history of the chain store focused on in this thesis, which I call by the pseudonym "Futajimaya",[34] and a description of the branch in which I worked and my own position as employee, researcher, and local resident. Chapter Four comprises a description of the annual recruitment drive aimed at new graduates, and the ways in which Futajimaya and two other rival stores represent themselves to potential recruits. Here, again, the aim is to break down the view of Japanese companies as homogeneous by examining the way in which even companies within the same sector seek to construct distinct identities for themselves. The way in which this process is influenced by discourses drawn from outside the dominant discourse of company-employee relations depicted above, notably from the area of popular youth culture, is also explored.

Chapters Five and Six describe the induction training undergone by one group of new recruits, and the ceremonies, formal and informal, marking their incorporation into the company. The role of these events in marking the transition to adulthood is also discussed, and the rival discourses of adulthood in Japan are examined. In Chapters Seven and Eight the role of the company in the life course of its employees is examined together with the importance of gender in the construction of company-employee relations in Japan. The working day is described in Chapter Nine, followed by an account of small group activities within the company as well as larger scale social events such as the company sports day in Chapter Ten.

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[34]This pseudonym has been adopted to protect the identity of the many employees who were willing to share their private, often critical, views of their employer with me.

The role of the company union, and the branch's relations with the local community are also considered in this chapter.

Finally, in the conclusion the various discourses framing company-employee relations in Futajimaya are summarised and discussed, and an attempt is made to formulate a more dynamic view of company-employee relations than that of the dominant discourse of Japanese companies in which employees appear in a rather passive undifferentiated guise. Instead, it will argued that employees may play a very active role both in negotiating their own involvement with the company and in redefining company-employee relations, within a framework constrained, but not entirely defined by notions of generation and gender in contemporary Japan. Although Futajimaya may be seen to intervene extensively in the lives of its employees, the course of this intervention is on terms that are not wholly decided by the company, but reflects a wide-range of influences ranging from the economic - current conditions of labour shortage or otherwise - to concerns of popular culture and shifting notions of what constitutes desirable employment practice; idealised notions of gender and lifecourse; and also individual employees' backgrounds and aspirations.

The way in which company-employee relations are represented rarely covers this range of influences, in part because private and public, inside and outside, tend to be compartmentalised into different discourses. The public discourse with which we are familiar is company centred, and neglects areas that emerge in an employee-centred life-course perspective, such as that furnished by individual employee narratives. Through describing a range of discourses, this thesis aims to convey the varied perspectives from which company-employee relations may be viewed, and to give a sense of the complex web of ideals, group interactions, personal

agendas, frustrations and compromises that constitute the daily experience of employment in one large Japanese company.

Chapter Two

The Context: The Retail Sector in Japan

2. 1. Large-scale stores in Japan - historical and legal background

Although Japan's relatively high proportion of small family-run retail outlets has become well-known in the wake of the US-Japan structural impediment talks,[1] large-scale stores also have a long history in Japan, and indeed have been part of Japanese retail since shortly after the opening of Japan to the rest of the world. The earliest large stores in Japan were called *hyakkaten*, literally, one hundred goods store, or *depāto*, from the English "department store". The Meiji era (1868-1912) department stores were often stores that expanded during this period from pre-Meiji origins as small family-run dry goods stores, for example, Takashimaya, now one of the most prestigious of the department stores, began in 1831 as a small shop dealing in kimono materials, run by a Mr Iida and his wife. Takashimaya is, however, by no means the oldest of Japan's department stores - it is predated by Matsuzakaya (founded 1611); Mitsugoya (later Mitsukoshi, founded 1673); Daimaru (1717); and Sogo (1830). The other major department store of this era, Iseyatan (later Isetan) was founded after the Meiji Restoration, in 1886.

The transformation of the old dry-goods stores into department stores involved more than just an expansion in size and in the range of goods sold. The Edo era (1603-1867) dry goods stores had no displays of merchandise, and sales were conducted from a large tatami-matted room, from where male clerks (no women were employed in those days) called out to attract customers and took orders. Merchandise was kept in a separate storage

[1] In the 1980s Japan had more than twice as many retail stores per thousand people as the United States or the UK (Sakuta 1990).

room, and would be fetched by the clerk according to the customer's specifications. These clerks also visited customers' homes to take orders, this practice being particularly prevalent where the customers concerned were upper-class ladies, who rarely ventured out to a store themselves.

The type of customer varied, with some dry-goods stores such as Daimaru or Echigoya (a predecessor of Mitsukoshi) catering to a range of classes, while others preferred to concentrate on the families of feudal lords. However, those that chose the path of expansion in the Meiji era tended to converge towards the elite end of the scale, following the then vogue among the wealthier classes for things Western in appearance, and constructing large Western-style buildings, notably in the downtown area of Tokyo. Mitsukoshi caused a sensation by adding a second floor to its Nihonbashi branch and installing showcases in 1905, while around the same time Shirokiya, later Tokyu, became the first store in Japan to employ female shop assistants. These early department stores, with their innovative architecture, became landmarks and tourist attractions in their own right, a trend which they sought to promote through advertising, and by making themselves cultural as well as commercial centres, complete with facilities such as galleries and exhibition halls. Mitsukoshi became an attraction on the standard tourist itinerary of Tokyo, following a successful advertising campaign in which it linked up with the Imperial Theatre, using the slogan "Today the Imperial, tomorrow Mitsukoshi" (Seidensticker 1983: 113).

In the process of this transformation, however, the department stores largely vacated the lower end of the market, concentrating on selling luxury goods while the marketing of everyday necessities was left to smaller retailers, often grouped together in bazaars. Also, the early

department stores were all in the centre of large cities - principally Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka. Small and medium-sized stores continued to dominate in the more outlying parts of the cities and in smaller towns in the provinces.

If the Meiji and Taisho eras saw the birth of the elite shopping cum cultural centres that were to become the modern Japanese department stores, the period from the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 to the mid 1930s witnessed the consolidation and expansion of this layer of the retail sector. In the post-earthquake rebuilding, department stores added more cultural facilities, discarding tiled roofs in favour of flat ones which could accommodate amusement parks and gardens, and began to appeal more to the mass market. One important innovation was the abandoning of the practice of removing shoes at the entrance to the store,[2] thus enabling customers to wander in and out more freely, and without the fear of their shoes becoming mislaid during their visit (a not infrequent mishap in pre-earthquake days [Seidensticker 1983]). Seidensticker argues that this change blurred the distinction between these stores and the smaller retailers who operated in bazaars where shoes were always retained,[3] and made the department stores more accessible to the mass market. The 1930s also saw the gradual introduction of Western dress for shopgirls, though

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[2]It was then, and remains the practice to remove shoes when entering Japanese homes, temples, many sports and leisure centres, and even some small offices. Slippers are often provided, or, in public centres, visitors may be asked to bring special footwear with them for indoor use only. This is part of a general demarcation between inside and outside that is highly stressed in Japan, and has already been discussed in Chapter One, Section 1.2 (Hendry 1987,1993; Bachnik and Quinn 1994). However, since the 1920s large stores have permitted their customers to retain outdoor footwear inside the store, except in fitting rooms.

[3]Small stores still often have a very restricted space for customers immediately adjoining and spilling out onto the street. The customer stands in this area and is served from the other side of the counter. Just behind is often a raised *tatami* (straw matted) area which marks the boundary between the private living space of the shopkeeper and the public domain used by customers. Shoes may be retained in the public domain, but must be removed should the customer step up onto the *tatami*, for example to take tea with the shop keeper.

this was prompted less by fashion than by a fire at Shirokiya in downtown Tokyo in 1933. Many of the deaths in the fire were caused by shopgirls falling as they slid down escape ropes from the upper floors of the store, This had occurred largely because some of the younger girls had only grasped the rope with one hand, leaving the other hand free to hold down the skirts of their kimonos and undergarments - it was not, at that time, a customary part of Japanese dress to wear underpants. Following this incident, Shirokiya required all its female staff to wear underpants and paid them a subsidy for wearing foreign dress. Newspapers took up the campaign and other stores began to follow suit (Seidensticker 1983).

But the most important development in the retail sector during the 1930s was the expansion of railway lines into the department store business, first undertaken by the Hankyū Railway, which opened a department store at the Umeda terminus in Osaka in 1929. Hankyū's example was quickly followed by the private railway companies in Tokyo, thus leading to the expansion of the areas served by department stores beyond the downtown districts to the main commuter hubs circling the city centre. At the same time, the department stores abandoned the old practice of visiting wealthy clients at home to take their orders, and instead concentrated on drawing people into their stores. The railway stores, of course, incorporated transport links, while older stores seeking to compete introduced free bus services. Free delivery was another innovation of this period. A final important change to note for this era was the shift in the range of merchandise sold by department stores, with a wider range of everyday items as well as luxury goods on sale.

The net result of all these changes was that department stores began to compete more and more directly with smaller retailers. This in turn led to

lobbying from the latter for protective legislation, which bore fruit in the Department Store Law of 1937. This law recognised the advantages that large scale conferred on the department stores, and sought to protect smaller retailers by requiring a permit for the opening or expansion of any department store, defined as "any single retail store dealing in a variety of goods that contained more than 1,500m^2 of floorspace" (Upham 1989:6).

This legislation lasted a mere ten years - in the immediate aftermath of the war such regulation was seen as undesirable, and the 1937 law was repealed in 1947. However, in the 1950s economic recovery began, and competition in the retail sector again began to intensify. In 1956 the lobbying of small and medium-sized retailers' groups for protection against the renewed menace of the department stores resulted in a new Department Store Law. This followed the same lines as the 1937 law, and re-introduced the permit system, while retaining the same definition of a department store. As Upham (1989) points out, this law in fact served the interests of both the existing department stores and the smaller retailers. It protected the former from new competitors entering their section of the market, while effectively producing a zoning system whereby small retailers could operate free from competition from large-scale outlets as long as they were outside the main urban shopping centres.

However, by the 1960s a new kind of large-scale store was emerging, taking advantage of a loophole in the existing regulatory system. These stores called themselves *sūpā* (from the English, supermarket) or *chēn stōa* (chain stores), and were based on US chain stores such as J.C. Penny's. Mostly founded in the 1950s as small family businesses specialising in one type of product, often food or clothing, these expanded in the 1960s to

become general stores, offering a range of goods comparable to those on sale at department stores. They were able to expand in size by housing several legally independent entities within a single building, thus bypassing the 1956 law's provision that no single retail unit of more than 1,500m^{2}could be established without a permit. In doing so they were able to exploit a gap in the retail sector between the prestigious department stores operating mainly in downtown areas, and the small and medium-sized retailers.

The new chain stores aimed to sell a wide range of goods cheaply, and to serve a wider geographical area than that served by the department stores. American chain stores provided the model both of type of merchandise and marketing, and of management structure, with a highly centralised management dictating policy to a number of standardised outlets. Areas particularly targetted were provincial centres that lacked department stores and the new sprawling suburbs of Tokyo and other large Japanese cities. The latter had until then been poorly served by large retailers, and new chain stores sprung up alongside the stations of the commuter railway lines; sometimes, but by no means always, owned by the company operating the line. In cases where a single company owned both a department store and a group of chain stores (notably Seibu railways, which until recently owned both Seibu department store and the Seiyū chain stores), chain store branches were opened at intervals along the suburban lines, with department stores at the main commuter hubs in the centre of the city and at a few important suburban shopping centres, as well as the downtown shopping areas.

The chain stores were able to undercut smaller retailers by making use of the advantages of large scale, and to undercut the department stores by

adopting a number of distinctive strategies relating to capital investment, merchandise sold, and staffing. Firstly, equipment investment was minimised - for example, display units, flooring, and lighting were then and remain now much less elaborate and luxurious in the chain stores than in the department stores. Secondly, chain stores purchased merchandise at low cost, on the whole avoiding the brand-named luxury goods on sale at the department stores. Goods were then sold at a minimal profit margin, the aim being to achieve high overall profits through high sales of competitively priced goods.

The chain stores also adopted a "self-service" system, using large numbers of part-time staff with little sales training. Under this system, the goods are laid out for ease of access by the customer, who simply helps herself, then taking the goods she has chosen to the nearest cash desk. Although staff are available to provide help and advice if necessary, the staffing levels are lower than in the department stores, and less training is given in sales. Such training as is provided for chain store staff is more concerned with the basics of greeting customers, wrapping merchandise, ordering goods, operating the cash desk, and doing necessary paperwork.[4] Another innovation was that of employing large numbers of part-time staff (typically 60% -70%) who are paid substantially lower wages than full company members, so that the overall wage bill is reduced.[5] An indirect measure of the success of this self-service system and its contribution to the profitability of chain stores may be found in the 1968 figures for

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[4]See Chapter Five for a detailed account of the training given to new full-time staff at Futajimaya.

[5]This compares with 1993 UK figures of 30% part-time staff for Marks and Spencer, and 50% part-time staff for the Burton Group. However, the Burton group announced in January 1993 that it planned to make 3,000 of its full-time staff redundant, and to proportionally increase its number of part-time staff in order to make more efficient use of its work-force (with larger numbers of sales staff concentrated at peak times) and to reduce costs. It seems possible, therefore, that large UK retailers in general may also move to a greater dependence on part-timers.(BBC News, January 1993)

average annual sales per employee in chain stores as compared to department stores, which showed that chain stores achieved a figure nearly ten times greater than that reported by department stores (8.24 million yen as compared to 846,000 yen. Figures from MITI "Commerce of Japan 1969", quoted in The Distribution Economics Institute of Japan 1971).

The strategy adopted by the chain stores was spectacularly successful. Between 1965 and 1969 this type of store doubled in number, while their sales increased nearly five-fold (Duncan 1974: 89). In the same period, department stores increased in number by only just over 25%, whilst doubling their level of annual sales. By the early 1970s, chain stores had made severe inroads into the areas of distribution previously covered by small retailers. They were also in a position to challenge the department stores for primacy in terms of turnover, if not in terms of prestige. By this point they had, in any case, increasingly come to resemble department stores in scale and range of goods sold, to the extent that a 1971 publication was reduced to defining department stores as "those covered by 'Department Store Law'" (The Distribution Economics Institute of Japan 1971:29).

Against the background of the rapid expansion of the chain stores, both department stores and smaller retailers, began lobbying again for the revision of the existing law on large scale stores, resulting in the enactment of the Large Stores Law of 1973. This law replaced the permit system with a system of notification and adjustment, and redefined the type of store targetted from a "single unit" occupying more than 1,500m^2 of floor space to any building with more that 1,500m^2 of retail space, regardless as to whether the occupants of the building are strictly speaking a single legal entity.

Under this system, MITI (The Ministry of International Trade and Industry) had to be notified of the intention to construct any new building falling under the umbrella of the 1973 law, after which MITI had to put up a public notice of this intention and notify the local Chamber of Commerce. The decision on whether or not to recommend that the store be allowed to open as planned was then to be taken by MITI, in consultation with local small retailers, but also taking into account the interests of local consumers. It was originally anticipated that this entire process would take seven to eight months.

Initially, the new law did not have much effect on the continued expansion of large stores, and the number of large stores in Japan almost doubled between 1973 and 1978 (Upham 1989:14). In addition, many of the chain stores once more found a way to circumvent the law by opening new branches of just under 1,500m^2. This situation led to further demands from small retailers for the law to be strengthened, and in the subsequent decade measures were passed extending the scope of the law from stores over 1,500m in size to stores over 500m^2 in size (1978) and modifying the adjustment process to allow for more extended consultation with local retailers. MITI's role was effectively reduced to that of providing a formal rubber stamp once local retailers had consented.[6] These changes led to extensive delays in the opening of new large stores, often of seven or eight years or longer, and in some cases the large retailers gave up their plans to open new branches altogether in the face of concerted local opposition.[7]

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[6]According to the owner of one large store to whom I spoke the consent of small retailers was sometimes eventually obtained through bribery, though he assured me this had not been the case for his store!

[7]This contrasts with the situation in the UK, where small retailers often welcome the opening of a large store in their area on the grounds that it will attract custom to the area. Part of the explanation for this lies in the different structure of retail in the UK, where chains of small speciality shops (e.g. chemists, clothing, shoes) grouped

However, as with the Department Store Laws of 1937 and 1956, the impact of the 1973 law was not entirely unfavourable to the large scale stores, as it had the effect of protecting existing market leaders and preventing the entry to the market of new competitors. This led to a mixed attitude among chain store executives at the prospect of the repeal of the law, with the President of Daiei, the largest of the chain stores, opposing repeal, while the president of Unii, frozen in a middle-ranking position among the chain stores by a tightening of the adjustment system in the 1980s, supported de-regulation. One chain-store official commented,

> To put it bluntly, the Large Stores Law is like a depression cartel for superstores. If we didn't have it and were forced to compete freely, there would be a major restructuring among the major companies via mergers and acquisitions.
>
> *'Gekishin' ima, ryūtsū ga kawaru* ('Severe Earthquake' now, distribution changes), quoted in Upham 1989:32

In fact, some restructuring had already occurred before the liberalisation of the law in 1990. The 1970s saw an intensifying of competition in the retail sector despite the protective action of the 1973 legislation, as speciality store chains, catalogue shopping, discount stores and convenience stores all began operations. A trend emerged for all these different types of retail operation to operate under a single umbrella, usually linked with one of the big chain stores. The IY group, for example, comprises the Itoyokado group of chain stores; the 7-11 group of convenience stores; two department stores, York Matsuzakaya and

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together in a high street or shopping centre, tend to dominate. As these are chains, they can offer low prices that department stores (the UK equivalent of both the Japanese *depāto* and the Japanese *chēn stōa*) cannot usually undercut. Such independently owned stores as do exist in the UK are usually small niche businesses that are not in direct competition with either the UK chain stores or the department stores. In contrast, in Japan the large retail units can, and do, compete successfully for the same custom as many of the small independent shop owners. That said, opposition to the opening of a new large store in Japan is to some extent selective, with the fiercest opposition coming from those independent businesses that are most directly threatened.

Robinson; three speciality store chains; a discount store chain; and three family restaurant chains; in addition to subsidiary companies dealing in food, services and real estate.

Particularly following the 1973 oil shock and the consequent economic slowdown, many chain stores opted for diversification, partly through expanding into the various retail niches as in the Itoyōkadō case above, and partly through assuring themselves of supplies of low-cost merchandise by setting up subsidiary manufacturing companies. another trend in the 1970s and 80s was for the chain stores to follow the department stores' lead in making themselves over as cultural/family entertainment centres. Small amusement parks sprang up on chain store rooves in analogous fashion to those built on department stores in the 1930s, and one chain store, Seiyū, has established a reputation for itself in both the theatre and film-making.

2.2. The Japanese Retail Sector in the 1990s

If one were to sum up the changes in the retail sector in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, it would be a picture of increasing convergence between the department stores and the top ranking chain stores, with the two becoming virtually indistinguishable to most foreign residents of Japan, who refer to all such stores indiscriminately as "department stores". True to their promise of the early 1970s, by the end of the 1980s the chain stores had overtaken the department stores in terms of both turnover and profitability, with four of the top five slots for sales in 1990 going to leading chain stores, and only Mitsukoshi of the department stores making a showing at number four (*Ryūtsū Keizai no Tebiki* 1991: 390-391).

In terms of the range of goods sold too, the chain stores moved away from their initial base of selling mainly food stuffs and secondarily clothing, to a broader range of merchandise comparable to that offered by department stores, as the table below shows.

Table 2.1

Ratio of sales by commodities - Chain stores and Department stores

		Food	Household appliances and sundry goods	Accessories and clothing	Other
1968	Chain stores	56.7%	12.6%	31.0%	0.9%
	Dept. stores	17.4%	27.1%	51.0%	4.5%
1985	Chain stores	35.6%	23.6%	27.9%	12.6%
	Dept. stores	19.3%	26.0%	47.7%	7.2%

(Source: 1968 figures from Annual Report of Department Store sales statistics and MITI "Commerce of Japan 1969", quoted in The Distribution Economics Institute of Japan 1971. 1985 figures from Nikkei Annual corporation reports 1985, based on average of figures for 5 leading department stores and five leading chain stores)

By the early 1990s more and more chain stores were also challenging the department stores for custom at the top end of the market, selling luxury goods and acquiring franchises for the distribution of foreign brand name goods - for example the Jusco chain acquired the rights to distribute Laura Ashley and Body Shop goods in Japan. Conversely, some of the department stores have attempted to move downmarket in order to improve their sales, with some success.[8]

[8]The best example of this is probably Marui, which has combined the marketing of low-priced goods aimed at the youth market with the introduction of credit sales. In addition, Marui copied the chain store principle of having a large number of branches of a smaller size than the giant department stores of the central shopping areas spread out along the main commuter railway lines. Marui has moved its image away from that of the mainstream department stores with such success that many Japanese consumers are now uncertain how to classify it, and tend to consider it as a special case, in a category of its own as a new-style credit sales store.

The face of Japanese retail looks set to change again with the agreement of the Japanese government in 1990 to reform the Large Stores Law in three stages. Firstly, the implementation of the law was relaxed by reducing the adjustment period prior to opening a store to eighteen months, to be further reduced to twelve months by the spring of 1991. And in the third stage the law was to be completely reviewed in 1993. The immediate result of the relaxation has been a flood of applications to open new large stores, although for some chain stores this has been accompanied by a series of closures of older, smaller branches.

The trend among chain stores seems to be to close smaller outlets alongside suburban railway stations, and instead to open large out-of-town shopping cum leisure centres, with parking facilities,[9] to attract families looking to combine shopping with entertainment for children. Department stores, on the other hand, are teaming up with commuter hub railway stations to expand their existing outlets and create giant new stores. At the same time, increased competition looks set to trigger a shake-out throughout the retail sector, with large retail groups such as Daiei out to acquire smaller chain-stores.[10] Small and medium-sized stores, forecast by MITI to decline in number by a further 20 per cent by the year 2000, are seeking to protect themselves by grouping together in large shopping centres, sometimes with a chain store as a core tenant to attract customers.

So the pattern of shopping in suburban Japan looks likely to alter from its present form of one or two chain stores near the local station surrounded by a patchwork of small retailers to a number of shopping centres

[9]The provision of parking facilities has become important with increasingly widespread car ownership, and in the light of the congested conditions and very limited parking spaces available both in city centres and in most suburbs.
[10]Most recently, Daiei successfully made a hostile bid to acquire a smaller chain in the summer of 1991.

equipped with parking and leisure facilities, sometimes entirely owned by a chain store, and sometimes jointly run by local small retailers. The number of large retail groups will be smaller, and distinctions between chain stores and department stores will probably continue to blur in terms of range of goods sold and services provided. Both types of store are likely to pursue a policy of opening ever larger units, but with the department stores continuing to cluster at the luxury goods end of the market and dominating the city centres, and the chain stores providing local shopping in the suburbs.

2.3. Japanese large-scale stores - an overview

Despite the blurring of boundaries between the two types of large store, and the inability of many visitors to Japan to reliably distinguish between them, from the perspective of the Japanese consumer department stores and chain stores in Japan still occupy two distinct conceptual categories. And although this thesis retains the English terms for the sake of greater readability, both the terms *depāto* and *chēn stōa* in Japan have somewhat different meanings from those of their namesakes in Europe and the United States. What, then, do *depāto* and *chēn stōa* signify to the Japanese?

The process by which the *depāto* have come to be associated with luxury goods has already been described. Given that few small luxury shops exist in Japan, and that those which do exist are not generally known and rely on a limited clientele, for most people buying luxury brand-name goods means going to a department store, where a large number of such items are gathered under one roof. Alongside prestigious Japanese brand-name goods such as Issey Miyake, overseas retail companies that in England or the

United States operate their own outlets, such as Burberry or Tiffany's, are also gathered under the department store umbrella in Japan, with their own mini-shops within the *depāto.* In this sense, the Japanese *depāto* correspond most closely in English terms to the famous shopping streets of central London, such as Knightsbridge, Bond Street or Regent Street. To take the example of individual stores, Harrods or Harvey Nichols offer possible parallels.

However, in contrast to the elite, exclusive, aura of these British stores and shopping streets, the Japanese *depāto* combine high prestige with a more universal, accessible appeal, that is, they are associated less with a particular social class than with particular sorts of social occasions, such as the twice-yearly gift giving in Japan that takes place in summer and at the new year, *ochūgen* and *oseibo.* Gifts given at these seasons are to people to whom one is socially indebted - for example teachers, corporate superiors, or, for small businesses, their connections in larger corporations who have brought them work over the previous year. Many of these gifts are therefore corporate purchases, or destined for people with whom the giver has some sort of business connection. The items given are fairly standard and usually of practical value - gift boxes of beer are one of the most popular items for men, while women often receive boxes of brand-name soap. But as, if not more, important than the item given is the wrapping in which it is presented,[11] with the most desirable wrapping being the instantly recognisable paper of one of the department stores.[12] As well as

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[11]See Hendry 1993 for more on the general importance of wrapping in Japan.

[12]Creighton writes:

> Although the exact same gift sets can be found anywhere, including discount stores, most people prefer to pay higher prices at a department store. The specific item given is not of major importance; that the gift was purchased at a high-ranking prestigious store is. The status and integrity of the store's wrapping expresses the deference and respect of the sender. This makes the

confirming and reinforcing the prestige of the *depāto*, these gift giving seasons are of considerable financial importance: Creighton (1991) points out that up to one third of annual department store sales are made up of sales at these two seasons.

Creighton (1991) also argues that department stores play an important cultural role in Japan, acting as "arbiters of the nation's fashion and customs" and offering their customers "not just merchandise and services but also status, prestige and respectability" (Creighton 1991: 677). Goods purchased at, or exhibited in, a department store in Japan acquire a seal of social approval: as Moeran (1987) has pointed out, in the art world to hold an exhibition at a department store is an important step in the process of establishing the reputation of the artist. Another role of the department stores which has ben identified by Creighton is that of mediator, introducing Western art forms and sports to Japan through their leisure centres, hobby groups and exhibition halls; while on the marketing side, Western goods and festivals are repackaged for Japanese consumers. Examples of the re-packaging of festivals given by Creighton (1991) include Father's Day, Christmas,[13] and Valentine's Day.

However, if the department stores play the role of innovators and legitimators of new practices, the chain store sector is never far behind when it comes to marketing. All the Western festivals promoted by the department stores are now equally heavily marketed in the chain store

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> department store wrapping covering a gift-box more important than the nature of the item inside it.
>
> (Creighton 1991: 681)

[13]Christmas appears to have undergone further repackaging in Japan since Creighton did her research. Although she reports it as an occasion for buying toys for children, by 1993 it was being heavily promoted in Japan as a romantic occasion for young couples to enjoy an evening out together.

sector, and the rise in chain store sales on these occasions bears witness to the fact that not all Japanese consumers feel it necessary to present gifts for the new festivals wrapped in department store paper. Although popular, these occasions are not taken as seriously as the mid-year and end of year gift giving. The gifts for Western festivals are purchased by and for individuals, and are marketed less as social obligations and more as an opportunity to express one's feelings (*kimochi*). This contrasts with the *ochūgen* and *oseibo* gifts, many of which are, as explained above, purchased by companies to fulfil corporate obligations, or, if offered by an individual, express an important socially defined relationship. Wrapping conventions are therefore far less rigourous for the Western festivals, with customers sometimes not even requesting that their purchase be gift-wrapped by the store.[14] Without the gift-wrapping, purchases made in department stores and in chain stores become indistinguishable, so many people save money by buying gifts for these occasions at their local chain store.

But in general terms, the chain stores are not seen by the Japanese consumer as places to buy special gifts, but rather as convenient local stores to buy everyday necessities, and in this sense they are somewhat similar to the local high street in England. Department stores, on the other hand, are places for a day out, to do some window-shopping or visit an exhibition, to purchase an important gift or a luxury item as a special treat. The personnel manager of Takashimaya, Japan's most prestigious

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[14] *Noshi*, as usually provided in large stores in the form of a strip of paper printed with an appropriate motif for the occasion, a picture of knotted string (the form of the knot varies depending on the occasion) and some hand written chinese characters, is also absent from the wrapping of gifts for the imported festivals outlined above, even where gift wrapping is provided by the store. However, *noshi* would generally be provided for *oseibo* and *ochūgen* gifts, as well as gifts for weddings, funerals, and birth. See Hendry(1993) for a more detailed account of the origin and use of *noshi*.

department store, summed up his view of the difference between the two types of store in the following terms,

> We aim to show people how they can create a beautiful living environment. If you want a coffee cup you can admire for its beauty, you can find one here. If you just want something to drink coffee out of, you can go to a chain store.[15]

In line with this difference in approach, the appearance of the two types of store also tends to be quite distinct. The department stores have exquisite window displays to lure the customers in, while the chain stores renounce such displays in favour of stalls selling cut-priced goods massed in front of the store, where windows would otherwise have been. Moving inside, state of the art lighting, polished wooden display units and immaculate flooring in the department stores contrast with basic fluorescent tubing, cheap laminated chipboard shelving and grubby linoleum floors in the chain stores. Everything in the department stores suggests quality and luxury, whereas cheapness is the keynote of the chain stores.

In terms of architecture, too, the department stores often occupy strikingly attractive buildings, ranging from the Art Nouveau Isetan building in Shinjuku (one of Tokyo's commuter hubs), to Seibu's sparkling high-tech creation in Yurakucho in downtown Tokyo. The nondescript modern buildings that house the suburban chain stores pale in comparison with these Tokyo landmarks, as well as being dwarfed in terms of size. To take an example, the average sales area of the Takashimaya department stores is 23,110m^2, whereas the average sales area of branches of Futajimaya, the middle ranking chain store group that forms the subject of this thesis, is only 6,000m^2.

[15]Personal communication.

The service offered by the staff, and staff numbers, are also strikingly different in the two types of store. On entering a department store at any time of day one immediately notices young women in distinctive uniforms posted at information desks near the entrance. More young women are posted in the lifts, where they ride up and down with the customers, announcing the goods sold on each floor, and gently sliding a white-gloved hand back and forward across the door as it opens and closes - an action of no practical value whatsoever, as the lifts are fully automated. Once in the sales area, when the customer wishes to make a purchase, she need rarely go as far as the cash desk - staff will always be on hand to take the money for the goods, then taking both cash and goods to the cash desk themselves, and returning with neatly wrapped goods (gift-wrapped if so desired), receipt, and change, all of which is presented to the customer with a small bow and the appropriate expression of formal thanks.[16] In contrast, the situation in the chain stores is much closer to that with which we are familiar in Britain, with no lift attendants or information desks, and with the customers expected to choose what they want and take it to the nearest cash desk themselves. Although staff are on hand to provide information and advice if desired, there is less a feeling of being waited on than one gets at the department stores.

While the department stores have created an image of themselves as both on the one hand modern and innovative, and on the other as establishments with firm roots in Japanese tradition, serving as arbiters of good taste in Japanese society, the chain stores are conceived of by

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[16]One feature of the high staffing levels in the department stores is that many of the staff are not directly employed by the store, but by one of the many small designer boutiques that the store contains. Yet more staff are seconded by the manufacturers of various brand goods on sale in the main body of the store. Chain stores contain fewer of these small sub-units, and also tend to have fewer staff seconded from manufacturers - partly because chain stores often market goods manufactured by one of their own subsidiary companies.

Japanese consumers in very practical terms - they are convenient local retail outlets offering a range of goods at low prices. In so far as any thought is given to their origins, they are perceived as an imported, basically American, institution.

But despite their more recent origins, and associations with the United States,[17] the chain stores fare badly in the youth market, with department stores being a far more popular choice for shopping, browsing and generally spending a day out with friends. The high prices of the department stores are not a significant deterrent: many young unmarried people in urban Japan, both male and female, benefit from a relatively high disposable income. Their living costs tend to be subsidised, both by their parents, and, if they are working and live in company-owned accommodation, by their employers who provide this accommodation at a low cost, as well as a range of other facilities, as discussed further in Chapter Four.

Young Japanese city dwellers also tend to be very trend conscious, buying fashion magazines to keep up with the latest fashions, and shopping for brand-name designer goods. Merry White (1993) notes that shopping is perhaps the most popular leisure activity among teenagers in Japan, and their favoured venues tend to be either the department stores, with their brand-name fashion goods, or areas crammed with small clothes shops carrying the latest fashions, such as Harajuku in Tokyo. These stores are popular for window-shopping as much as for making actual purchases, as they provide an important source of information on the latest trends. The

[17]Goods and pastimes associated with the United States, such as hamburgers; coca-cola; anything associated with Disney; and baseball, which has become Japan's most popular sport, have enjoyed an extended vogue among successive generations of young people in post-war Japan.

chain stores, on the other hand, target the bargain conscious housewife, with most of their customers being women aged over thirty who live within walking or cycling distance of the store. Their goods are often seen by the young and unmarried, including their own employees, as *dasai*, a contemptuous term that denotes something hopelessly out-of-date,

The consequences of this difference in image between the two types of stores stretch beyond marketing considerations to exert a strong influence on recruitment. The department stores combine a more glamourous, youthful, image with the lure of security and the prestige of working for a large, famous, and well-established company. Life as an employee of a department store has even been romanticised in the realm of popular culture, with a television drama devoted to following the fortunes of a young male recruit to Isetan, and a comic strip, or *manga*, also dramatising employment in a department store. All this contrasts with the chain store sector, unsung in popular culture, which, with its middle-aged image, can offer neither the prestige nor the youthful glamour of the department stores. Nor can the chain stores offer the same degree of job security, given their history of mergers and consequent redeployment of staff.

So while the prestigious *depāto* can take their pick of the graduates from Japan's most famous universities and high schools, many of the *chēn stōa* have had difficulty filling their vacancies during Japan's periodic labour shortages. The ways in which three particular chain stores have responded to this situation by trying to create a distinctive corporate identity that will attract young recruits is considered in Chapter Four. However, this is a problem that largely affects the recruitment of full-time employees, and, as noted above, the majority of chain store employees are classified as part-timers, a category of staff that are somewhat easier to recruit. Thus to some

extent the chain stores are able to circumvent their difficulty in attracting young full-time members of staff owing to the unusual structure of employment in this part of the retail sector.

2. 4. Employment Structure and Career development in the Retail Sector

One of the peculiarities of the retail sector in Japan is its large number of "part-time" employees. A 1988 survey showed that of all the part-time workers in Japan[18] 45% were employed in wholesale and retail; another 31.9% in manufacturing; 18.7% in services; and only negligible percentages in other sectors of the economy (Japan Institute of Labour 1990:26). And viewed from the perspective of relative percentages of part-time and full-time workers in a given industry, again wholesale and retail come top, with the percentage of part-time workers reaching 18%, exactly double the figure for manufacturing and nearly double that for services, the only other significant employers of part-time labour.

However, even in this context, the chain stores, where the part-timers constitute the majority of the workforce, are clearly in an exceptional position. As indicated above, the use of a high proportion of part-timers was one way in which the chain stores sought to cut costs when they were first established, although now part-timers are also widely used in department stores.[19] In fact, the term part-timer is a misnomer, as these employees often work thirty or more hours a week. Rather, the best way to

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[18]Defined in this survey as "those whose scheduled working hours per day are shorter or whose ordinary working days per week are less than those of regular workers" (Japan Institute of Labour 1990:26)

[19]For Seibu Department Stores the relative proportions in 1988 were sixty percent full-time staff and forty percent part-time staff, but these figures did not include the large numbers of floating temporary workers, or *arubaito*, a category of employee discussed in further detail below (Lam 1992: 147-148).

understand this category of employee is in opposition to the other category of employee, the *seishain*, or full company members. The point at issue is not so much hours worked as status within the company. While the *seishain* draw a monthly salary, receive sickness benefits, contribute to the company pension scheme, and are protected from redundancy by their membership in the company union; "part-timers" receive few or none of these benefits, and are paid at an hourly rate that ensures them in most cases a considerably lower take-home pay at the end of the month than is the case for their *seishain* colleagues. So what decides which employee is allocated to which category on entry to the company?

As noted in Chapter One, "lifetime employment" is an influential norm in large Japanese companies. In practical terms, this refers to the preference for recruiting new graduates straight from high school or university. These recruits become the *seishain*, the official expectation being that they will then remain with the company until retirement (in the case of men), or until marriage or the birth of the first child where women are concerned.[20] Although it is possible to become a *seishain* in some companies at a later point after graduation, or even, perhaps, a period of employment with another company, this path is both more unusual and more difficult, and has even been given a special term: *chūto saiyō*, or mid-career recruitment.[21] Mid-career recruitment is essential for companies that have only recently been established, or that are experiencing a period of rapid growth, and was therefore widely practised by the chain stores during their period of expansion, but once a company is established, it tends to revert to the norm of recruiting only new graduates as *seishain*.[22]

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[20]I describe the process of recruitment in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[21]A misnomer, as it is used even to refer to recruits in their early twenties who missed the recruitment boat the first time round.

[22]This pattern is also described by Clark in his account of a medium sized manufacturing company. Clark tells us that the shift to recruiting new graduates was

"Part-timer" is therefore in many cases the only status available to those who wish to join a large company at some time after graduation. As such, it spans a wider range of employees than one might at first imagine, including not merely employees who want to work only a few hours a week, but also those who wish to work full time, but are unable to obtain *seishain* status. The two principle sub-divisions of the part-timer category are given separate terms in Japanese: *pāto* (from the English, part-time) and *arubaito* (from the German, *arbeit*).

The precise pay and conditions corresponding to each category vary from company to company, but broadly speaking the *pāto* work longer hours, are eligible for more company benefits (for example, travel expenses), and earn a lower hourly rate, owing to the deduction of tax from their salaries. This status attracts mainly women returning to work after a break for child-rearing, and the hours offered enable them to drop off their children at school in the morning and collect them in the evening, a considerable attraction. A 1989 survey of the Japanese labour force found that 10.2 % of the workforce as a whole had *pāto* status, but whereas this status covered 26.1% of employed women, it included only 0.9% of employed men. The *arubaito*, on the other hand, were much more evenly split; accounting for 4.1% of the workforce as a whole, 3.4% of employed men, and 5.54% of employed women (Japan Institute of Labour 1990: 25).

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partly in order to cut the wage bill by employing more young men who could be paid low wages, but more importantly,

> School recruiting was a customary practice among companies of Marumaru's size, and in adopting it Marumaru was declaring its newly gained position in Japanese industry. Moreover, now that Marumaru was substantial enough to have its own company way of life' (*shafū*), it was best to recruit young people without experience elsewhere which might prejudice their receptiveness to what they were told at Marumaru.
> (Clark 1979:156)

Pāto often receive some degree of training, and are entrusted with relatively responsible jobs, such as operating the cash registers. They also wear a company uniform, and are therefore, to the outsider, indistinguishable from the *seishain*, except by age - because of the peculiarities of the pattern of recruitment and employment for women in Japan, young women employees tend to be *seishain*, while those aged thirty and above tend to be *pāto*, though this is not an infallible rule. Once established, their work schedule follows a set pattern, with a specified shift each day, often from around 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Holidays and days off (unpaid) may be taken by prior application, but too many days off at busy times tend to provoke grumbling from fellow members of staff in the same section.

Arubaito, on the other hand, tend to be school or university students, and often work for a few hours in the evenings, when chain stores are often short-staffed as the part-timers go home at the end of their shift; at weekends, or in school holidays. They are a floating element of the workforce, who receive no company benefits, have no job security, and receive little or no training. They wear their own clothes, covered with an apron, and do the simplest, most physically tiring work: moving goods round the store for the men, and shelf-filling and cleaning for the women. They do, however, have an advantage over the *pāto* in that they receive a higher hourly rate - no tax is deducted from their wages, on the basis that their annual income is beneath the tax threshold. Both *pāto* and *arubaito* have in common the fact that they are locally based, and recruited by the branch at which they work, in contrast with the *seishain*, who are recruited by the central organisation of the company, and may be drawn from all over Japan.

On the whole, the *arubaito* seem content with their lot: they choose this type of employment because it suits them as a temporary measure. *Arubaito* work also has a high degree of flexibility: they may work as many hours as they wish, and take time off (unpaid) when they wish. Some *arubaito* may work five or six full days a week, either as a stopgap between school and finding a permanent job, or as an alternative to more fixed employment after leaving school. The people who choose this employment path on graduation are generally not very concerned about job security, and value the relatively high hourly income and flexibility that this type of work bestows. *Pāto*, on the other hand, generally take the status of part-timer because no other options are open to them, and many complain of the low wages and lack of job security that this status entails.

Little movement exists between the three statuses of employee - *seishain*, *pāto* and *arubaito* - within any one company, though it is not uncommon for some individuals, in particular women, to occupy all the different statuses in a succession of different companies in the course of their lives, working as *arubaito* when they are students, then joining a company as *seishain*, leaving to get married (or to travel, study, or pursue their own interests), and rejoining the workforce as a *pāto* at a later date. Sometimes a woman may rejoin as a *pāto* the company she has previously worked for as a *seishain*, but I did not encounter many such cases in my fieldwork.

This may be in part because women working as *pāto* tend to choose a company as near as possible to where they live, and by the time they rejoin the workforce they may well no longer be living near the company for which they originally worked. In any case, there is rarely any particular advantage in rejoining the same company, as any previous experience will not usually be taken into consideration, either in the post allocated or in

the wage received - there is little provision for extended career breaks for women in most Japanese companies.[23]

There is a period of eight weeks statutory maternity leave in Japan, but it would be impossible for most women in the retail sector to rejoin a company as *seishain* on the expiry of this period, as there are very few workplace creches and state nursery provision does not extend to the working hours required - until 7.00 p.m. or later in the evening, and with compulsory working on Saturdays and Sundays. Barring help from relatives, usually parents or parents-in-law, the only way for most women with young children to continue work in a large store that is compatible with the daycare facilities available has therefore tended to be as a *pāto* or *arubaito*,[24] with *pāto* the preferred choice for most.

In chain stores, then, the workforce consists of a core of male *seishain*, with the older men almost all in managerial positions, and the visible sales staff in the branches who are mainly female. The women employees can again be divided into the *seishain*, most of whom are single women under thirty, and the *pāto*, most of whom are married with children. In addition to this more or less stable workforce, there is a floating temporary workforce of *arubaito*, both male and female. In the following chapters, the varying work experiences and inter-relationships of these diverse sorts of

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[23]See Lam (1992) for an account of a career break scheme introduced by Seibu in the 1980s which was considered relatively progressive in Japanese terms, but still did not provide any firm guarantee of work being available if and when the woman chose to return, or that she would be able to resume at the same level at which she left. Perhaps in part because of this lack of guarantees, Lam reports that the scheme has not been taken up by significant numbers of women.

[24]Japan has, however, been plagued with periodic labour shortages as a consequence of its booming economy, with less popular employers being particularly badly hit. As a response to this problem, in 1991 some large stores were beginning to introduce more flexible work schedules for their female *seishain* in a bid to reduce staff turnover by enabling women to return to work after childbirth. It remains to be seen whether these new schemes will be any more successful than that introduced by Seibu a decade previously.

employees will be considered in more detail, in the context of the chain store at which I conducted my fieldwork, which I have renamed for the purposes of this thesis "Futajimaya". But first, Chapter Three is devoted to a description of Futajimaya itself, and to a consideration of my roles as employee, local resident, middle-aged housewife and customer, and researcher, at the Hatakeda[25] branch of the Futajimaya chain in a western suburb of Tokyo.

[25]Like Futajimaya, Hatakeda is a pseudonym, adopted to protect the identity of the people who work in this branch, many of whom were highly critical of the store.

Chapter Three

Futajimaya

3.1. The setting: Futajimaya, Hatakeda branch

The Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya, at which I conducted my fieldwork during 1990-1991, is located in a Tokyo suburb, about a thirty minute train ride from Shinjuku. It is a fairly mixed area, with substantial private houses interspersed with low cost municipal housing, privately owned apartment blocks, and more dilapidated private houses. North of the station, the area was largely farmland until about thirty years ago, when a period of rapid construction began. Today, little farmland is left, and the main distinguishing feature of the area is its enormous park, reputed to be one of the three best places in Tokyo for viewing cherry blossoms.

Construction of shops in the area was first dominated by small family businesses, but in the early 1970s the first large chain store, Seiyū, was built immediately in front of the north exit of the station, followed three years later by the construction of a Futajimaya store, a mere fifty yards or so down the street from its rival. Initially, small local shops, especially clothing shops, campaigned against the opening of the two chain stores, but twenty years on there was little evidence of lingering bad feeling, with local shop owners' families shopping regularly in the large stores, and sometimes socialising with the employees, even in at least one case taking a bride from among the young female staff.

The branch manager who was in charge of the store when I conducted my fieldwork was at pains to emphasise that great importance is placed on the

store's role in the local community. There are a number of community activities in Hatakeda in which employees from all the large local organisations participate, for example sports events and also a local dance festival. Representatives of Futajimaya are active in all these events, helping to maintain the store's high profile in the community. And the store had also become involved in local politics in the 1980s, when the company union had supported the candidacy of one of the branch employees in the local elections. A member of the Democratic Socialist Party, then in opposition to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, the employee succeeded in his election bid, with the help of vigorous campaigning by his fellow employees, who were ordered to support his campaign by the company union. One woman recalled,

> I used to be so shy, you wouldn't believe it. Just like the new trainees you see now, I didn't dare open my mouth. But what cured me of it was that election campaign. We had to go round on those trucks, you know, with loud-speakers, asking everyone to vote for our candidate. I was so embarrassed. But we didn't have any choice, we just had to do it. After that you could never feel shy again.

This former employee turned politician continued to maintain close ties with the store, appearing regularly at company social events. Though unfortunately I never did manage to discover how much of a help it was to the store to have a friend in local government, it seemed that by the 1990s Futajimaya was well established, and influential in the local community.

The Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya has seven floors and a basement, with a total sales area of 10,000m^2 of which 6,600m^2 is occupied by Futajimaya, and 3,400 by tenants.[1] It is therefore slightly larger than the average

[1]This pattern of letting large proportions of a store to tenants, many of whom may have a close personal connection with the main store, or even be subsidiary companies of it, is quite characteristic of large chain stores in Japan. It is basically a response to the legal constraints on opening large stores imposed by a succession of laws in Japan, as outlined in Chapter Two.

Futajimaya branch (6,000m^2), and has nearly twice the sales area of its neighbour, Seiyu. Its large size helped this branch to survive in the increasingly competitive atmosphere that prevailed in the retail sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1994 it was one of only two Futajimaya stores remaining along this stretch of railway line. Two other neighbouring branches had closed in recent years - one in September 1991 -resulting in the relocation of many of their staff to the Hatakeda branch, as well as a reshuffle of existing personnel at Hatakeda.

In appearance, the store is fairly typical of large Japanese chain stores, as described in Chapter Two. Window displays are forgone in favour of a larger sales area, with the space outside the front of the store taken up by customers' bicycles and stands selling an ever shifting selection of low priced goods on special offer. It is always very congested outside the store, especially at the side, where only a narrow alley separates it from the *pachinko* parlour next door,[2] and the store periodically gets into trouble with the fire department because of the customers' bicycles blocking the street.[3]Inside the store, the customer's eyes are immediately drawn to numerous stands displaying cut-price goods, and the day's special offers are further reinforced by announcements on the tannoy system. This also provides a stream of background music, often songs recorded specially for Futajimaya, in which the store's name is repeated again and again in the choruses.

The Hatakeda branch sells a wide range of goods, including household necessities, furniture and toys as well as clothes, Futajimaya's original speciality, with each floor roughly themed to bring together similar goods.

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[2]Pachinko is a popular slot machine game resembling pinball.

[3]Fire risks were always a sensitive subject with Futajimaya after a serious fire in one of their branches claimed several fatalities.

White linoleum flooring and cheap-looking display units combined with the ubiquitous cut-price stands help to create a bargain basement atmosphere. However, some luxury goods such as imported designer brand leather handbags, gold jewellery, and fur coats, are also available. As is common with chain stores, the goods sold are aimed chiefly at the middle-aged housewife market (identified by in-house research as Futajimaya's main customers), and, from the point of view of the younger generation of Japanese, including most of the store's young employees, lack fashion "sense".[4] Most of the younger employees therefore prefer to do their shopping elsewhere, despite the employee discount that is available to them.

Sections of the store let off to tenants provide services such as an opticians, a hairdressers, a camera shop, a bakery, and a chemists. The whole of the basement is let to a rival chain store which uses it to sell food, an area of sales that Futajimaya only entered very late in its history, and does not yet provide in many of its branches. Subsidiary companies in the Futajimaya group run the jewellery and electrical goods sections. Other noteworthy tenants include two sections let out to former Futajimaya company members, who were asked by the company to establish their own stores. Establishing their own stores as tenants within a branch of Futajimaya is one of the career paths available to male company members who fail to be promoted to the higher ranks of the company by the time they reach their forties or fifties.

Futajimaya follows the pattern early established by department stores and later imitated by the chain stores in providing a range of non-retail

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[4]The word used in Japanese is *sensu*, a foreign loan word used to mean a sense of style, commonly used in connection with personal appearance or interior decoration.

services. Theatre, cinema, and concert tickets may be booked at the store, as may rail and plane tickets. Other services provided include a postal service and a rental service for baby goods. Babies can be weighed in the baby section, and a playground on the roof offers miniature train rides and other fairground type amusements for older children.

As far as its role as employer is concerned, on 1st April 1991, the Hatakeda branch had 172 employees, of whom only a third were full company members or *seishain*, the remainder being "part-timers".[5] Of the *seishain*, a majority were women (thirty five out of fifty seven), but all the senior management posts were occupied by men until September 1991, when a woman floor manager was transferred to the Hatakeda branch. In its staff composition, this branch is probably fairly typical, although there are fewer male employees in some other branches.[6]

Management structure follows the standard pattern for all Futajimaya branches. At the head of the store is the branch manager, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the store, as well as the recruitment and training of the various types of part—time staff.[7] Beneath the branch manager in rank come the deputy branch manager and the general manager (who mainly deals with administrative work), followed by the floor managers, each of whom is normally in charge of one floor.[8] At the most junior level of managerial staff are the section chiefs, each of

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[5]The categorisation of employees is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

[6]The branches have a higher percentage of female staff, while head office has a greater concentration of male employees in managerial positions.

[7]The part—timers are all recruited by individual branches as the need arises, and are not subsequently transferred, whereas full company members are recruited by head office, trained all together on a special training course once a year, and then allocated to a branch store.

[8]This is how the system is supposed to work, but in September 1991 one floor of the Hatakeda branch acquired a second floor manager, the woman referred to above, who was transferred from a neighbouring branch that had been closed. This seems to have been in order to avoid redundancies, rather than from any necessity for two managers on the floor.

whom is in charge of a particular section. However, owing to staffing difficulties, not all sections in the Hatakeda branch had a section chief at the time I conducted my fieldwork. About half the section chiefs at Hatakeda are women, but only one woman occupies a higher position than section chief - the floor manager referred to above.

3.2. The lens:[9] Myself in the Field

In terms of local employment opportunities, Futajimaya is an obvious port of call for married women in the Hatakeda area who wish to rejoin the job market but who have no particular skills. Hours are fairly flexible and fit in with school hours, thus making the work attractive for mothers seeking to juggle home responsibilities and outside employment. For all these reasons, it was also an attractive fieldwork site for me, as a Hatakeda resident with a pre-school age child. However, the route by which I eventually came to work at Futajimaya was somewhat circuitous.

I had initially intended to conduct my research at a department store, but had been unable to gain access to any of those I had visited. Through my local network of friends and aquaintances, however, I was able to make contact with a local businessman and property owner, Mr Sekiguchi. Mr Sekiguchi was also a graduate of one of Japan's more prestigious universities, Keio; and tried initially to use his Keio contacts at one of the department stores on my behalf. After some weeks of silence from Mr Sekiguchi, I contacted him, but to my disappointment he told me he had been unsuccessful in persuading the department store to take me on. Then he paused, and asked rather diffidently if I thought it would be quite out of

[9] I use this term in order to highlight the effect that I had on the material collected: as explained in this section, the data I gathered was constrained by my gender and by my status as wife and mother of a small child, as well as by my status as foreign researcher affiliated to a prestigious Japanese university.

the question to do my research in a chain store instead? He only mentioned it because he happened to know the manager of the local branch of Futajimaya, and if I wished he could talk to him for me. I said I would certainly be interested in meeting him, and to my surprise, having been expecting another long delay, Mr Sekiguchi immediately picked up the phone and telephoned Futajimaya. After a very brief conversation, he stood up and told me we could go over and talk to the manager right away.

Walking into Futajimaya, it was obvious that Mr Sekiguchi was a well-known figure. He stopped on the way up to the office for a chat with the deputy branch manager, to whom he introduced me, and showed me the section of Futajimaya that he rents for an ethnic goods store, run by his wife. In the office, he introduced me to the branch manager, and, after chatting about Futajimaya in very general terms for a few minutes, Mr Sekiguchi asked the manager if he would take me on as a part-time member of staff in order for me to do a research project on the store. The manager wanted to know when I could start, and how many hours I could do, and Mr Sekiguchi suggested mornings, as he said I could then join in the early morning meetings and hear them play the company song, which he thought I would find interesting. Somewhat dazed, I walked out of the store not long afterwards with my fieldwork apparently all set up.

My entry to Futajimaya, then, was thanks to a local Hatakeda network, under the patronage of Mr Sekiguchi and the branch manager. This is important in so far as my view of the store remained firmly locally based, and I had only limited contacts with the store's central organisation. This has some obvious drawbacks to the extent that I had no chance to observe the way in which the company is managed at the most senior level, nor the way in which important decisions are reached. However, this locally-based

perspective is also that of the vast majority of the female employees, whether full company members or part-timers, who generally spend all their working lives in one branch, only venturing further afield for company social events or, in the case of full company members, for their initial training.

I had, however, initially intended to supplement this local perspective by later visits to the head office of the company and interviews with senior management. This was a project I eventually abandoned, as my fieldwork revealed highly critical views of the company on the part of a number of the staff. In a climate where the declining fortunes of the company made many insecure about their jobs, "lifetime employment" notwithstanding, I did not wish senior management to take too close an interest in my activities, or request to see the results of my research, as it would have been next to impossible to conceal the identity of my informants from anyone familiar with the store. Although some of those to whom I spoke clearly wanted their criticisms made public, this was not universally the case, and I would not wish to put any of the Hatakeda employees in an embarrassing position. It is also for this reason that, as already noted in Chapters One and Two, throughout this thesis pseudonyms are used, for the company, the area, and the staff. My contacts with the wider company beyond the Hatakeda branch were thus limited to company social occasions, recruitment drive seminars, and the initial training programme for new recruits, in which I participated.

My research is therefore limited by its "bottom up", locally-based perspective, as well as by the constraints imposed by my own generation and gender, and the fact that I am married to a Japanese man and had a small child at the time I was doing my fieldwork. In my early thirties, I was

classified as a middle-aged woman in Japanese terms, one of the "auntie" or *oba-san* generation. This meant that certain types of behaviour were seen as inappropriate for me - more particularly so as my husband is Japanese, and I was therefore expected by the Futajimaya employees to conform to Japanese norms of behaviour. For example, there was a limit to the extent to which I could participate in drinking parties, an important type of socialising in Japan. All-male drinking parties were out, and when, in the course of an evening's outing it came time for the women to return home and the men to carry on drinking alone, I had to go home too. Much of the informal world of the male employees was therefore barred to me.

In addition, my age placed me in a somewhat awkward position: too old to be a friend to the younger female employees, but too young to share the same concerns as the older generation of part-timers, many of whom were grandmothers. My generation of women in Futajimaya was distinctly thin on the ground, composed of a mixture of full-timers who had either not married or were childless, and a few part-timers with very young children. It therefore took me some considerable time to make friends with other female employees sufficiently to be able to talk in a relaxed and informal way. Here my one of my greatest assets turned out to be my daughter, who was cooed over by employees of all ages, both male and female when I took her on shopping trips to the store, or, on occasion, on company outings. Younger women would ask me about childbirth, while the older ones would give me advice on childrearing. The male employees would carry her around and play with her, and many of the older male managers were prompted to tell me stories of their own experiences in bringing up children. My other great asset was my foreignness, as employees of all types would ask me about life and work outside Japan, and occasionally ask me for help with English, which few of them could speak, although most of

them wanted to learn. One of the managers was a great fan of Mrs Thatcher, which also gave us much to talk about.

So in between work and talking about children, England, and Thatcherism, I asked questions, sometimes conducted more formal interviews, listened, looked, and took notes. I did not use a tape recorder, both because it seemed impractical in the context of the workplace, and because I judged it would have an inhibiting effect on those to whom I spoke. Taking notes instead had the advantage of allowing the people I interviewed to look at, and check, what I had written, as I increasingly tended to write in Japanese as my fieldwork progressed. I did not conduct any surveys myself either, though I did have the advantage of being given the results of an extremely comprehensive company union survey on attitudes to work and the company.[10] This was a mine of valuable information, and helped me put my own personalised, somewhat anecdotal material in a wider context.

Although my initial difficulties in speaking to fellow employees in a relaxed way were frustrating, in the end these difficulties themselves contributed to my research. Over the months that we worked together, I found a shift took place in the kind of statements other employees would make to me, underlining the importance of the *tatemae* versus *honne* distinction, or, to put it another way, the distinctions between outsider- and insider-oriented discourse.[11] At first an outsider, full-timers largely

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[10]This survey was conducted every five years, beginning in 1986. In the 1986 survey, questionnaires were only distributed to full company members, but in the 1991 survey one sub-category of part-timer, the *teijishain* (discussed in more detail in section 3.4) was also included. Slightly different questionnaires were distributed to men and women *seishain*, and to the *teijishain*. All responses were anonymous. For the 1991 survey, responses were collected from 62.4% of male *seishain* (1,542 responses) 69.6% of female *seishain* (1,769 responses) and 63.5% of the *teijishain* (864 responses).

[11]The meanings of the terms *tatemae* and *honne* are discussed more fully in Chapter One, section 1.4. The opposition between outside and inside is one aspect of the

ignored me, and new recruits were tongue-tied and non-committal when I spoke to them. The branch manager himself declined at first to answer any questions about the company, telling me to come back and ask him again after I had worked there for a while and had absorbed the atmosphere.

I gathered later that few people expected me to stay as long as I did - eleven months - leaving, as it turned out one month after the branch manager who had first allowed me to work there was transferred. At the second stage of his leaving party, when we had adjourned to a karaoke bar and most people appeared pleasantly inebriated, he announced to me that he had never thought I would last, and that I was the only foreigner ever to have worked that long in the store. He said he thought most foreigners did not have the right spirit to last in the job, and somewhat emotionally added that he hoped I would always continue working there, at least part-time.

For me, the turning point in my research was after I took part in the training course for new full-time recruits, six months after joining as a part-timer. On returning from the course I found that other full-timers began to talk to me more, and I started to be invited to company events and parties. Eventually I came to be regarded with a certain amusement, and would be greeted by groups of employees with comments such as "Watch out, it's Matsunaga-san coming to interview you." "Be sure you tell her the truth now." "Matsunaga-san, stop taking notes!" Even after I had stopped working at the store, I returned periodically on shopping trips with my child, and later, children, over the next two years, and cheered on the Futajimaya dance team at the local festival. This longer-term involvement has enabled me to add postscripts to some of the personal material I

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contrast between these paired terms, and the one that seem most pertinent in this context.

collected, and to add some time depth to both the life histories and the history of the Futajimaya group. However it also gives me an acute sense of the incomplete and partial nature of much of what follows: Futajimaya's future remains in doubt, as do the linked working lives of its older employees, especially as Japan enters recession. So it should be borne in mind that this research was conducted in a relatively prosperous period in Japan, when people were able to plan for the future with a degree of self confidence and optimism. This is particularly noticeable in the attitudes of the younger employees and new recruits, which in the grimmer climate of 1994 may now be quite different.

3.3. Historical Background

The development of Futajimaya has broadly followed the lines described in Chapter Two for the development of the chain store sector. The first store was opened outside a station in one of the more distant suburbs of Tokyo by the founder, the eldest son of a futon shop owner, and his wife, in 1948. The autobiography of the founder points out with some pride that although he is a contemporary of the founders of two of the most prestigious of the chain stores, Daiei and Itoyōkadō, Futajimaya was the first of the three to be established.[12] Initially it was a small family business selling futons and everyday clothing, but as it prospered more branches were opened and the range of business expanded.

By 1962 Futajimaya had become a chain store with ten branches, and in 1963 it moved its headquarters to their present location in Nihonbashi in central Tokyo. Futajimaya continued to expand in the 1960s and 70s, and

[12] I have omitted a bibliographical reference here in order to preserve the store's anonymity.

established a number of subsidiary companies, including a clothing manufacturing company supplying low-priced merchandise to Futajimaya stores. Throughout this period Futajimaya was one of the top-ranking chain stores, outranking Daiei and Itōyōkadō both in size and market share. In 1968 Futajimaya became one of only three chain stores to be listed on the first section of the Tokyo stock exchange (Daiei, now the biggest chain store group in Japan, did not achieve this distinction until 1973, and Itōyōkadō not until 1974). By 1991 the Futajimaya group had 115 branches throughout Japan and two branches overseas, as well as over fifty subsidiary companies, including a chain of convenience stores; a chain of discount shops; a chain of speciality children's clothes shops; and a travel agency.

The downside of this apparent success story, however, lies in Futajimaya's steady loss of prestige and market share relative to its competitors throughout the 1980s. While Daiei and Itōyōkadō pursued a strategy of expansion through takeovers and mergers with other chain stores, Futajimaya tried to grow as a single entity. Also, while other chain stores relied on food for a large proportion of their sales (see Chapter Two, table 2.1), Futajimaya delegated that part of their business to a subsidiary company that was only finally absorbed into the main company in 1989. More importantly, by no means all Futajimaya branches had a food section at all. A number of managers to whom I spoke blamed the decision not to sell food for Futajimaya's decline. They pointed out that other chain stores could draw in customers with the intention of buying food, and that once there they might be tempted by other items on sale. [13] Futajimaya, however, concentrated on clothes, and was therefore weaker than its rivals

[13]In the British context, the revitalisation of Marks and Spencers through the addition of food halls is a good example of the same principle.

in that it was less likely to draw in people simply doing their daily shopping.

Another problem faced by the Futajimaya group was one of management. It is a common pattern in Japanese companies for a sort of personality cult to form around the founder - interviews with him appear in the press and in company publications, a biography is often published, and his philosophy of management as enshrined in company proverbs is committed to memory by successive generations of new employees. The founder of Futajimaya was no exception to this rule, but in his case I encountered a certain reticence among managers, and in some cases more or less open criticism of his management style. It seemed that the founder had had an authoritarian "one-man, top-down"[14] style of management. As long as he remained in charge, men in middle and junior management posts felt that they had no voice in the running of the company, and were generally nervous about giving their opinions. It was strongly implied to me that the founder had made a number of bad decisions on the way the company should develop, and that he was largely to blame for the way in which Futajimaya had fallen behind its rivals.

The first big crisis for Futajimaya came in the 1980s, when the group was restructured as part of its diversification programme, resulting in the large-scale re-allocation of staff amongst the newly formed subsidiaries. As a result of this, the figures for full-time employees show a marked annual fall for the years between 1982 and 1987.[15] This generated a certain amount of discontent amongst those staff who were reallocated, many against their

[14]The words (in English) of one of Futajimaya's recruitment officers.

[15]Company figures show 5,518 full-time employees for 1982, but only 3,329 for 1987.

will, and the 1986 Company Union survey[16] showed unprecedented levels of criticism of the company and senior management. In 1988 the founder retired from active management, becoming president of the Futajimaya group, and passing on the post of managing director to his son. This was also made the occasion for the launch of a "New Futajimaya" campaign, one of the features of which was ostensibly a shift away from a management style dominated by one person to a philosophy of greater consultation with employees, and a focus on the organisation rather than on its leader.

At the same time, there was a concerted attempt to improve Futajimaya's image, with the adoption of a new company song composed by a then popular singer; a new motto; and a new statement of company vision.[17] Futajimaya began selling food in 1989, and staff numbers again began to rise. In April 1991 there were 4,770 full-time staff, of whom 2,400 were men, and 2,370 women. A further 5,560 part-time staff appeared on the company records.[18]

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the New Futajimaya campaign appears to have failed to revive the company's fortunes. A large fire in which fifteen people died took place in a branch of Futajimaya in western Japan in the spring of 1990, further denting the chain's reputation. In 1992 compensation claims from the relatives of victims were settled, and in the same year company operations slid into the red for the first time. The

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[16]Anonymous surveys were carried out by the Futajimaya company union every five years on its membership, with the aim of assessing work and company consciousness. As these were restricted to union members, most part-time staff were excluded from the survey, although one sub-category of part-timer was admitted to the union shortly before I began my fieldwork, and therefore featured in the results for the 1991 survey. The discontent reflected in the 1986 survey therefore reflects the views of the *seishain* at Futajimaya at that time.

[17]See Appendix 1

[18]This is probably an underestimation, as it only includes the *pāto*, not the *arubaito*. The distinctions between these two types of part-timer is elaborated in Chapter Two, section 5.

founding family resigned *en masse* in October 1992, vacating the posts of President, Managing Director and another senior management post held by the son-in-law of the founder. The public statement said that by taking this action the family accepted responsibility for the decline in the company's fortunes. Their one concern, according to the statement, had been to ensure that compensation claims relating to the fire were settled before they resigned, and now that this had been done it was better for the company to go ahead under new management. A senior employee of the group was promptly appointed Managing Director, while the company's bank was approached with a request to provide the next company president.

At the time that I conducted my fieldwork Futajimaya appeared to be a company in decline: scarcely more than a year later it seemed more accurate to describe it as a company under threat, particularly as Japan was then entering recession. The company has been carrying out a programme of branch closures since 1990, ostensibly with the aim of rationalising its operations away from small stores situated near stations, and towards large out of town shopping centres, in line with general trends in the retail sector. However, there must now be some doubt as to how far it will be able to carry through its ambitious programme of constructing new stores.

The fact of having (accidentally) chosen to study a company in decline has a number of consequence for the findings of my research. Firstly, there was quite a high level of discontent and anxiety about the future, which might be absent, or less significant, in a more secure company. And secondly the company's prestige had suffered badly, affecting its ability to recruit staff, and the tactics that it used in order to do so, as will be described in Chapter Four. Finally, both of these factors had a knock-on

effect on employment relations, in so far as there was generally little sense of positive commitment to the company, especially among the younger employees. Much of the material presented in this thesis therefore contrasts sharply with the dominant representation in writing on Japanese companies depicting employees as identifying strongly with their company.

It is important to stress here that Futajimaya is not intended as an example of a "typical" Japanese company, rather it is a highly specific case with certain particular features arising from its history and current economic situation. However, the material from Futajimaya does suggest at the least that the dominant representation of Japanese companies may be inaccurate for the less prestigious and economically successful among them. Rather than presenting an alternative normative model of "the Japanese company" therefore, the argument in this thesis is that it is inherently misleading to regard large Japanese companies as homogeneous, and that factors such as the company's economic and social ranking are crucial in framing employment patterns within that company. This argument will be developed further in the context of recruitment in Chapter Four.

3.4. Employment Structure and Career Paths within Futajimaya

Employment structure in Futajimaya follows the pattern outlined above for large retail outlets in Chapter Two, section 2.4, with the staff divided into full company members, the *seishain* ; and "part-timers", the *pāto* and *arubaito* . As of April 1991, company records showed that 53.8 per cent of employees were part—timers, a percentage that has not substantially

altered over the last ten years or so. However, this is probably not a completely accurate record, as it does not include the *arubaito* , whose numbers fluctuate so much that it is impossible to estimate them accurately in the company records. Also, while head office employees are mainly full company members, in the branches there are more part—time staff. For the average Futajimaya branch, therefore, the percentage of part—time staff probably rises to between 60 and 70 per cent.

As is generally the case in chain stores, the career paths of male *seishain* have changed over time, with mid-career recruitment during the chain's period of establishment and expansion giving way to a policy of recruiting only new graduates. Of the senior managers at Futajimaya's head office, all of whom are male, roughly one third previously worked for other companies, while for the Futajimaya group as a whole the percentage of mid-career employees rises to nearly 40 per cent.[19] Other deviations from the "norm" of lifetime employment have occurred owing to the restructuring of the 1980s, when many male employees found their careers at the main company abruptly cut short, as they were relocated to subsidiary companies. When these cases are coupled with those of younger male employees who, as is the situation generally in Japanese companies, have a much higher turnover rate in any event than their older colleagues,[20] it can be seen that actual patterns of employment for male employees often diverge widely from the ideal norm, expressed by management and employees alike, that male employees join Futajimaya on graduation and remain until retirement.

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[19]1991 figures, from the Futajimaya Company Union Survey. This percentage is for the Futajimaya group as a whole, and is therefore slightly higher than it would be if the Futajimaya chain stores alone were considered. This is because subsidiary companies of the Futajimaya group continue to employ mid-term recruits.

[20]See also Clark 1979:186-7.

Most male *seishain* are on a national contract, which means that they are subject to periodic transfers anywhere within Japan, sometimes entailing long periods of separation from their families.[21] Unmarried men under thirty generally live in company dormitories, while older married men either live in a house that they have purchased with help from the company, or in company accommodation. Having once established a family in one location, they do not generally move the family when they are next transferred, and may only see their wives and children rarely.[22]

The national contract is not the only one available to men: they may also choose to limit the area within which they will accept transfer, in which case they are known as "zone" employees, or may opt to remain within the same branch throughout their career, in which case they are classified as "home" employees. It is rare to find a male "home" employee - this status is generally reserved for female *seishain*, but I did encounter a number of men who had opted for zone status, invariably for family reasons, generally ill-health of one or more family members. However, such a choice had serious implications for the career of the man concerned, imposing a ceiling on promotion prospects.[23]

Up to a certain rank, career progression for men in Futajimaya follows a predictable path. The rank of section chief should be achieved within four years, and the rank of floor manager, or manager within head office, within nine to fifteen years. From this rank, however, paths differ. Some will move on to the position of branch manager, or senior head office

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[21]This situation seems to be fairly typical of male employees of large companies in Japan.

[22]I was told by one manager that such men may keep a mistress in the area they have been posted to.

[23]An example of one man who chose this option is discussed in Chapter Eight.

manager, and a few will make executive rank at head office. However, a majority will never move beyond the rank of ordinary manager, as there are not enough senior posts to go round. The most promising men tend to get creamed off early and sent to head office, while of those who remain in the branches a few will become deputy branch managers or branch managers, usually by the time they reach their early forties. Those who are still floor managers in the branches in their forties are therefore a mixture of men who aspired to promotion but were passed over, and those who have consciously opted out of the promotion ladder by opting for zone rather than national status. It is not company policy to promote zone employees beyond the rank of floor manager.

Success within the Futajimaya group is thus predicated not only on being a male university graduate, a necessary minimum qualification, but on a willingness to submit to the company to the extent of enduring long separations from home and family as and when the company demands. Nor is this unusual, but forms part of what is generally expected of male Japanese employees in large corporations, indeed this willingness to put company first is an aspect of the way masculinity is constructed in Japan, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

The transfer system, combined with the working hours of the retail sector (stores in Japan are open on Sunday, when most non-retail employees have the day off) tends to lead to most male employee's lives becoming very much centred on the company over time. For them, socialising tends to equal drinking with fellow company members (generally male), and their long-term bonds are with Futajimaya rather than with a particular neighbourhood, as tends to be the case for women employees. One manager in his forties who I asked about his social life replied, "Yes, all my friends

are fellow employees. With our work schedule, working on Sundays, it's hard for us to see people who work for other companies. And anyway, we eat from the same rice pot" (i.e. the same company pays their salaries). So that even if life-histories deviate widely from the life-employment norm, for the career-orientated members of the male work-force the tendency to be "enveloped" by the company is marked.

There is no official discrimination between male and female employees on the basis of gender at Futajimaya, but a highly effective unofficial system exists through the sorting of new recruits into two categories depending on whether they are university or high school graduates. During the period 1964 to 1989, male employees were recruited exclusively from universities,[24] and although recruitment of male high school graduates resumed in 1989,[25] it is still true that the vast majority of male employees are university graduates. As far as women employees are concerned, I only came across one female university graduate employee at Futajimaya during my fieldwork - all the rest were high school graduates. Official company policy differentiates between employees on the basis of educational achievement, with the university graduates in the national contract scheme and high school graduates given "home" employee status, with correspondingly fewer promotion chances. In practice, this division follows gender lines.

This kind of unofficial gender sorting system is quite common in Japanese companies. Lam (1992) cites a 1981 Ministry of Labour survey showing that

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[24]From 1948 to 1963 both male and female recruits with only a middle school or high school education were accepted. In 1964, graduation from university (for men) and from high school (for women) became a minimum requirement.

[25]It was at this time that the chain began to sell food. This is a type of business for which less highly educated male staff are targetted, compared with other sections of the store

nearly three quarters of firms hiring university graduates only recruited male university graduates, and another 1983 survey showing that very few women graduates work in large enterprises - 18.7 per cent as compared to 60.5 per cent of male graduates (Kawashima 1983, cited in Lam 1992: 52). Although many firms (Futajimaya included) are unwilling to state that these differential hiring patterns are deliberate company policy, there does seem to be a clear preference among large firms for hiring junior college[26] or high school graduate women to fill junior, non-career track positions. In the 1981 Ministry of Labour survey companies that expressed an unwillingness to employ female university graduates gave the following reasons:

> - female high school leavers and junior college graduates were sufficiently well qualified for the jobs (55 per cent)
> - jobs for university graduates were limited to men only (25 per cent)
> -female university graduates quit too soon (16 per cent)
> (cited in Lam 1992: 60)

Commonly, the reasons for this discrimination against female university graduates is summarised and justified with reference to women's expected life course:[27] the ideal age for marriage is supposed to be twenty-five for women, and it is expected that all women will marry, and if possible will then have children. They are expected to resign from their company at the latest by the birth of their first child. It is therefore argued that it is in the employer's best interests to use women in relatively unskilled work, requiring little investment in training, and to hire them as young as

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[26]Junior colleges offer two year courses of tertiary education. They are a popular choice for female high school graduates, partly because of the lack of employment opportunities for women who graduate from four year university courses. However, they attract very few male students - almost all junior college students are female.

[27]The way in which life-course expectations for women in Japan are constructed is explored further in Chapter Seven.

possible in order to maximise the period of their employment by the company.[28]

Futajimaya personnel officers were reticent about the paucity of female university graduates in the company, simply remarking that perhaps such women were not interested in applying. However, it is likely that this lack of interest may have reflected a combination of the knowledge among women university students in Japan of the difficulties they are likely to face in entering any large corporation on favourable terms and more specifically a knowledge of Futajimaya's poor record in employing women in senior positions. It is also possible that the company in past years had pursued an unofficial policy of discouraging such applicants, and was unwilling to admit it to a female university based researcher. Finally, it should be noted that there are, in any event, far fewer female than male university graduates in Japan, owing in large part to the poor employment prospects women face on graduation.[29]

In contrast to their male colleagues, female employees, even those who are full company members, find their lives less bounded by the company, both normatively and in practice. Long-term commitment is neither expected, nor, in most cases, given, and since female employees are employed under the home contract their promotion prospects are in any case limited. Official company policy urges them to stay for at least three years, and urges them to do their best to reach the rank of section chief. But this constitutes the effective ceiling to their career advancement - in the whole Futajimaya chain only three women had been promoted as far as floor

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[28]A (Japanese) management perspective on this issue is given by Takeuchi (1982).

[29]In 1990 male four year university students outnumbered female university students by nearly three to one; while in sharp contrast women made up 91 per cent of junior college students (Statistics bureau 1991).

manager by 1992, and none beyond that rank. In line with general practice in Japanese companies as outlined above, women *seishain* are expected to leave, if not on marriage then by the time they become pregnant with their first child. Provisions did exist for women to take maternity leave and resume work later, but to take advantage of this would run counter to both company and social norms, in addition to posing not inconsiderable problems in arranging childcare, as noted in Chapter Two.

The management representation of the typical employment pattern of female *seishain* at Futajimaya, as expressed to me in interviews, was a brief period of employment at junior level, followed by resignation in order to marry or to have children. However, this was somewhat at variance both with the results of the company union survey on this issue, and with the accounts given to me by the young women with whom I worked. In the company union survey of 1991, fewer than one third of the women full-time employees stated that they wished to stop work on marriage or on the birth of their first child. On the other hand, this did not mean that they saw themselves as "career women". Only 18.9 per cent expressed a wish to continue for a long time, while 17.4 per cent said they wanted to stop soon, but not to get married. The remainder (about half the sample) were "don't knows", possibly reflecting either a reluctance to commit themselves, or to disclose their intentions, even anonymously, to the company.[30]

From more detailed interviews conducted with the women *seishain* at the Hatakeda branch it would seem that many of them had their own life course

[30]In several cases I came across, it was common knowledge among a group of friends that one of their number intended to quit as soon as possible, with in one case a new recruit planning from the outset to spend only one year at Futajimaya. However, this kind of information was usually withheld from the management of the company, as it was known that such plans would be disapproved of, or might even lead to the new recruit's job offer being withdrawn. In addition, when young women did leave they often gave false reasons for doing so.

agenda, in which Futajimaya was an initial staging post, and marriage seen as an ultimate goal, but with other goals to be pursued between the two. These alternative agendas, and their implications for the emergence of a stage of independent young adulthood in the lives of Japanese women, are considered further below in Chapter Seven.

The other side of female employment within Futajimaya is the employment of middle-aged women as *pāto*. Broadly speaking, the pattern of employment for *pāto* in Futajimaya follows that described for retail as a whole, but two important sub-categories of *pāto* specific to the Futajimaya case deserve a mention here: *junshain* and *teijishain*. *Junshain* can be translated as junior company member, and confers the advantage of health insurance and twice-yearly bonuses in return for a slightly lower hourly rate of pay than that received by ordinary *pāto*. *Teijishain* is a sub-category of *junshain*, and is a status open to *pāto* with at least one year's service, who pass a special exam. In addition to the benefits received by all *junshain*, *teijishain* status confers membership in the company union, a privilege only open to this category of part-timer. Since one of the main functions of the union is to resist any of its members being dismissed, this status also confers greater job security than that attaching to other part-time positions.

Neither *junshain* or *teijishain* status are generally differentiated by staff when talking about their own or others' position in the company: the middle-aged *junshain*, who form the majority, refer to themselves as *pāto*, while only the young *junshain* will identify themselves as such.[31] This seems to fit in with the tendency for female staff to divide along

[31] *Junshain* status is sometimes offered to young (usually female) recruits in their twenties who have missed the *seishain* recruitment drive aimed at new graduates.

generational lines, with the younger staff being mostly *seishain* or *arubaito*, and the older ones *pāto*. Although older *seishain* do not hesitate to identify themselves as such, for the ambiguous category of *junshain*, older women will identify themselves with the *pāto*, whereas younger women tend to distance themselves from this status, with its aura of middle age. No part-time staff, whether *pāto* or *arubaito* are eligible for promotion.

The *arubaito* come at the bottom of the Futajimaya hierarchy. These, as described above, are in the main casual student labour, but also include some who have worked as Futajimaya *arubaito* on effectively a full-time basis for an extended period, and had chosen this work pattern in preference to the more restricted (though more secure) working conditions of the *seishain*.

To talk about company employees as a general group is, therefore, in the Futajimaya case at least, a nonsense, and indeed the company itself recognises the diversity of its staff in the various categories to which they are allocated. The main dividing lines that are used by the company to classify employees are those of gender, education, and part-time/full-time status. If official employment status is left to one side, an alternative way of viewing the divisions within the company is along the lines of gender, generation, and place of origin (rural or urban). For any branch in the Tokyo area, the female *seishain* are mainly young, from rural backgrounds; the *pāto* are female, middle-aged, and generally from the city; the *arubaito* are young, urban, and may be either male or female; while only the male *seishain* span the generations and the rural-urban divide.

However, as we have seen above, these dividing lines are not as simple as they at first appear. To take only the example of gender as a classificatory device, not all male employees resemble each other, even if they are of analogous level of education and generation and enjoy full-time employment status. Further differentials are introduced by such factors as whether or not they are mid-term recruits, whether they have opted for a zone or a national contract, and how successful they have been in the promotion stakes. Any notion of a typical male employee receives a further blow from the male *arubaito*, whose work strategies seem radically different from that of the stereotypical Japanese salary man. Equally, female employees fail to follow neatly the stereotype of the young *seishain* working until marriage and childbearing persuade her to leave the workforce.

One might reasonably ask at this point, what, if anything, joins these different employees together? What made them choose Futajimaya as their employer, and having chosen Futajimaya, how are they integrated into the company? What, indeed, does the notion of Futajimaya as a company mean to them, and how do they perceive their role within it? And how are they affected by the company's continuing loss of status and market share? As a first step to answering these questions the next chapter investigates the process of recruitment, and examines the ways in which Futajimaya and its rivals attempted to create distinctive corporate images and to attract new company members, in the highly competitive context of the 1991 recruitment drive.

Part Two

Outside Face, Inside Face

Chapter Four

Recruitment: the repackaging of Japanese companies for the youth market

4.1. The formal organisation of recruitment

Notionally the recruitment of full members of large companies[1] in Japan follows a fairly regular pattern, with all these companies, once established, recruiting the majority of their new *seishain* from the graduates leaving high school or tertiary education each year. Voluntary agreements between the employers' association, Nikkeiren, and the schools and universities exist to regulate this procedure. For high school graduates, individual applications may be made to companies from July 1st, teachers' recommendations may be submitted from September 5th, and company entrance examinations may be held from September 16th. Until 1991, the rule for University graduates was that contacts between the company and new recruits could be made from August 1st, with firm offers of employment issued from October 1st for entry the following April. This was relaxed in 1991 to allow companies to begin recruiting University graduates from July 1st.

For both high school and university graduates, entry to large companies is by examination and interview, examinations typically including both an IQ and a character test.[2] For University students, this is preceded by a round of seminars held by all the companies in the main urban centres, while for

[1]Medium sized and small companies have different recruitment practices, and take far more mid-career recruits.

[2]The IQ test at Futajimaya was written in the USA, while the character test was devised by a Japanese company specialising in this kind of test.

high school students the process of selecting a company to which to apply involves going through the written job offers sent to their high schools and collated by their careers advisers and then consulting with parents and teachers.

In the process of mutual selection between companies and recruits, a number of important factors come into play, which are further examined below. The first is the principle of ranking, whereby all companies and educational institutions are ranked relative to each other, with a large number of publications available giving the current rankings according to different criteria. This is elaborated on in section 4.2, but suffice it to note here that the process of recruitment involves to a great extent matching recruits from particular educational establishments with companies of the appropriate rank relative to that establishment.

The second important factor is the state of the labour market. Throughout this century, Japan has experienced periodic labour shortages in particular sectors of the economy. In 1991, a labour shortage of new high-school and university recruits existed, leading to fierce competition among the less highly ranked companies for the available recruits. In this climate, the emphasis was less on the recruits trying to present themselves in a favourable light for their potential employers, and more on companies re-packaging themselves to create a more attractive image for the potential recruits. In addition, there was considerable media interest in the aspirations of this new generation of young adults - termed by the mass media *shinjinrui*, or new people. The ways in which the *shinjinrui* have been represented in popular culture, and the efforts of large companies to target them in recruitment drives are examined in section 4.4 of this chapter.

4.2. The ranking system

The ranking system is fundamental to recruitment in that the companies to which any individual applies will tend to be circumscribed by the ranking of the institution at which he or she is studying. Virtually all institutions in Japan, from company down to kindergarten, are ranked,[3] and the most prestigious and high ranking companies target recruits from similarly high ranking educational establishments.[4] Great importance is therefore placed on entrance to a high-ranking university, at least for men, although for women in Japan a university degree can be a liability in the job market, for reasons explored in Chapter Three, section 3.4. However, the type, and rank of high school or junior college attended is still very important in determining which women end up with which companies, and many companies regularly recruit their female intake from the same select group of high schools and colleges. Whether university, college, or high school, each institution has an overall name value on which there is a fair degree of consensus. *Ichiryū* (first class) and *niryū* (second class)[5] are two particularly common ways of referring to general ranking (*sanryū*, or third class, is also sometimes heard), not only for schools and universities, but also for companies.

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[3]An indication of how seriously ranking is taken in Japan is the large number of publications issued annually listing the ranking of schools, colleges, universities and companies. For example, for the retail sector the Ryūtsū Keizai no Tebiki lists the relative ranking of the chain stores and department stores according to various criteria including turnover and profitability. Analagous examples can be found in every sector of the economy, and also for educational institutions.

[4]This has led to parents being anxious to enter their offspring in prestigious schools from as early as age three, in order to secure their future employment prospects. A number of universities have linked high schools, junior high schools, elementary schools and kindergartens, and in what is commonly termed the "escalator system" entry to the kindergarten at the foot of the ladder generally ensures eventual entry to the targetted university. So even at the kindergarten entry stage, competition can be fierce, and the ranking and connections of the institution are very important.

[5]The connotations of these terms are explained in more detail in Nakane 1970:95.

Meritocratic in intent, the result of this system is to limit the choices available to graduates of lower-ranking institutions to a considerable degree, as top companies aim to recruit graduates of top ranking universities, and competition is intense for the few places available. For example, in the retail sector, graduates of top universities such as Tokyo, Keio, or Waseda, can fairly safely aim at the most prestigious end of the sector, the department stores, while graduates of middle ranking universities would probably have to content themselves with the high ranking chain stores.

The process of finding a job, for graduates of tertiary education, is therefore largely a matter of first deciding on a field, for example retail, and then applying to the various companies in that field which the individual calculates are most likely to accept him or her, based on the ranking system. Although the applicant will then have to sit the company examination, the results obtained may not in fact be very significant. A recruitment officer I interviewed at one of the more prestigious chain stores said that often they decide whether or not to take someone on the basis of impressions gained in the interview, the exams being a mere formality. She contrasted this with the procedure at non—retail companies such as NHK(the Japanese equivalent of the BBC), where she said much more weight was given to the exam. "They need smart guys, we don't". She said that her store was looking for friendly, well—spoken staff with an interest in retail, but also mentioned at another point in the interview that they were hoping to increase their intake from the top universities, a statement that I would link with that store's determined efforts to raise its ranking.

For high school graduates the process of recruitment is even simpler, as only companies of an appropriate rank will appear in the job offers collated at the school's career office, so it is then a matter of choosing the sector in which you wish to work, and deciding, within that sector, which company's exam you are most likely to pass.[6] Even so, the element of choice can be overstated: decisions about applications are reached in consultation with school careers advisers, who try to avoid several students competing for the same job, preferring what amounts to an allocation system - if the company says it can offer three jobs to students at that school no more than three candidates will be put forward.

Another important, though informal, channel of recruitment linked to the ranking system is the old school network, referred to in Japan as "school cliques", the *gakubatsu.*[7] These work in a somewhat similar way to Britain's old school tie network, providing contacts and channels or introduction, information, and recruitment between students and their potential employers through their seniors, or *senpai,* who have already graduated and are now working. In the case of universities, many companies send staff to visit their *alma mater* when the recruitment season begins in order to try and recruit students entering their final year. This sort of recruitment is most common in the most prestigious institutions — recruitment at some departments of Tokyo University, for example, tends to follow this pattern.[8]

The old school network is also important as a channel of informal information on employers, as opposed to the formal information produced

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[6]Sample exam questions from each company are often included in the information packs provided by schools' career advisers.

[7] Also referred to by Nakane, 1970: 117

[8] Personal communication, Professor Itoh, Tokyo University

in company handouts and seminars. University seniors tend to mistrust the latter to a certain extent, discounting much of it as *tatemae*, the way that the companies wish to present themselves, although it is an essential source of basic information on questions such as wages, holiday entitlements, accommodation, and fringe benefits. However, to supplement this, and to get a feel for what it is like to work in the company, and how far the company lives up to its own publicity, information derived through informal channels, particularly seniors from the same school who are now working there, is invaluable.

Gakubatsu also play a role in recruitment at high schools, since, as noted above, some companies have special links with particular high schools which regularly provide them with recruits. However, some high schools have got their fingers burnt through relying on such links in the past, as in times of economic slowdown companies recruit fewer staff, with potentially dire consequences for high schools that rely heavily on only a few companies to place their graduates. For this reason, one high school recruitment officer to whom I spoke said that his high school had a policy of placing all their students with different companies, only one student per company, although favourable economic conditions in recent years have caused them to relax this rule slightly. In this way they can provide a large number of companies with recruits on a year-to-year basis, and maintain links with the maximum number of potential employers.

4.3. The labour shortage

If the ranking system has produced intense competition at the most prestigious end of the educational/employment scale, the labour shortage of the late 1980s and early 1990s created serious problems for companies at

the lower end. Beginning in 1988 and continuing for the duration of my fieldwork, Japan experienced an increasing labour shortage of new high school, junior college and university graduates, owing to a combination of economic growth and the declining birth rate. The trend for more and more students to continue on in some form of tertiary education meant that there was a particularly severe shortage of new high school graduates. By 1989, only 35.6 per cent of high school graduates were entering the labour market, compared to 60.4 per cent in 1965, and 44.6 per cent in 1975 (Japan Institute of Labour, 1990: 19). Over the same period, the job openings to applications ratio for the under nineteens rose rapidly from 1.6 in 1965 to reach a peak of 7.4 in 1973 (the early seventies were also a period of labour shortage), thereafter steeply falling to 2.8 in 1975 and a low of 1.4 in 1986 before rising again to reach 3.6 in 1989 (Japan Institute of Labour, 1990: 20).[9] For the age group twenty to twenty-four, which includes graduates of tertiary education, the job openings to applications ratio rose from 0.6 in 1965 to 1.7 in 1973, thereafter falling to 0.7 in 1975, and rising again to reach 1.5 in 1989.

The labour shortage meant that companies had to compete to attract new graduates , and this posed a particular problem for small and medium-sized companies and for the lower ranked of the large companies, as well as all those in sectors (such as retail) that are heavily dependent on high school graduates. Probably the worst hit sectors were those popularly characterised in Japan as the three Ks - *kitanai, kitsui, kiken,* (dirty, tiring, and dangerous), such as the building trade,[10] but a survey released by the Labour Ministry in December 1991 showed that personnel shortages were

[9]Job Opening/Applications Ratio = active openings/active applications. Figures given here are for the whole of Japan, but the ratio varies considerably depending on region, and on the ranking of the institution concerned, as explained further below.

[10]These jobs are increasingly filled by immigrant workers, whose status has yet to be legalised.

also reported by 53 per cent of manufacturing firms; 45 per cent of wholesalers, retailers and eating establishments; and 58 per cent of service industries (Daily Yomiuri, 11 December 1991).

One result of the shortage was to undermine the formal system of recruitment described at the beginning of this chapter. At the time of my fieldwork in 1991, large companies in fact began the recruitment of university graduates in April or May, a full year before the new intake was expected, and several months before the official milkround was due to start, even by the amended 1991 rules. By the 1st of August most aimed to have filled their vacancies, with only the lower ranked companies still struggling to attract enough new full-time staff for the following year.

Two detailed flow charts of the recruitment procedure for university graduates obtained from Futajimaya and a rival chain store both show essentially the same pattern. First, seminars were held in the main urban centres of Japan, almost all in May, June and July. Then there were three rounds of interviews and exams, following which the candidates were informed whether or not they were successful. An interesting variant of this pattern was that Futajimaya's rival also held "company explanation meetings"(*kaisha setsumeikai*) at the beginning of August. When I asked what these were, and how they differed from the seminars, a company representative explained to me that because Nikkeiren guidelines at that time prohibited recruitment meetings before the 1st of August, the meetings before that date were entitled seminars, and purported to provide general information about work in the retail sector. From August they were allowed to be more specific. But she added that in practice there was little difference between the two types, except that by the 1st of August

they had filled almost all their vacancies, so the later meetings were just a way of filling up the last few places.

By August 1st, informal offers of employment had already been issued to the successful candidates, Nikkeiren guidelines notwithstanding. Most candidates had applied to several companies, and some now had to make a choice as to which offer they would accept. At this point, many companies arranged special company trips for the coming year's intake, at the company's expense. These were referred to as *kōsoku*, a word meaning restriction or restraint. As these trips all took place around the same time, the candidate was forced to opt for one only. And going on the trip also meant that they would be unable to make any last minute applications to other companies. So the *kōsoku* were a way of making the candidates make a firm commitment to the company.

As far as high school recruitment is concerned, the practice in the late 1980s and early 1990s was for recruitment officers to begin visiting targetted high schools from late April, meeting careers advisers and teachers, and bringing pamphlets with information on their company; formal notices of employment available (*kyūjinhō*), which contain a summary of the work and conditions offered and basic company statistics; and sometimes videos about the company. At this time teachers may also name students they think would make suitable recruits. Thereafter, the timetable follows government guidelines, with applications from July, a formal examination in September, and then the final interviews. Large, prestigious companies tend to be the most in demand because of the security they can offer, an important consideration for many recruits and their families, and can therefore cream off the best of the students. Such companies also tend to have the most difficult entrance exams.

High schools targetted by recruitment officers tend to be of two types: vocational high schools or lower-ranked ordinary high schools (graduates of higher ranking ordinary high schools tend to go on to further education). Japan's vocational high schools are classified into six types depending on the kind of courses they offer: industrial (offering subjects such as mechanics and electronics), agricultural, fisheries, commercial, home economics and nursing. Companies targeting the vocational high schools will select a high school teaching subjects appropriate to the company's needs — for example, manufacturing companies tend to target industrial high schools.

Companies in the retail sector look for recruits from the lower ranking ordinary high schools, or the commercial high schools. However, as many companies from various sectors are targeting these schools, competition for recruits is quite stiff. Or at least this is true in the metropolitan areas of Japan, where a large number of companies are concentrated. In rural areas there are far fewer locally-based employers, and the job openings to applications ratio in the outlying areas of Japan is therefore not as favourable as in the main urban centres and surrounding districts.[11]

In this context, and given that the higher ranking companies all recruit in the Tokyo area, one solution for lower ranking companies with a recruitment problem is to recruit their high school graduates from areas outside Tokyo, and preferably outside Kantō (the larger geographical area within which Tokyo is located). This has been the pattern followed by

[11]For example, the ratio in Hokkaido was 0.59 in 1989, and for Kyūshū (despite the urbanisation of the northern part— Kita Kyūshū city and Fukuoka) 0.80, with Tohoku not faring much better at 1.08. In contrast, the ratio in North Kantō for the same year was 2.10, and for South Kantō 1.49(JETRO 1991: 119).

Futajimaya, where the vast majority of female *seishain* are drawn from outlying areas of Japan, particularly Tōhoku in the north-east and Kyūshū in the west,with the percentage of non-local staff among the female *seishain* at the Tokyo branches of the chain exceeding 90 per cent.

With this type of recruitment one motivation for joining the company may often be a desire to leave home, and move to the city, as I found for a large number of Futajimaya's female *seishain*. In such cases, the company is attractive to the new recruits not for its own intrinsic qualities, but because it can offer access to an independent urban lifestyle enjoyed by young adults in the gap between joining the workforce and getting married. This type of young, urban, adulthood is celebrated by popular culture in television dramas; novels; magazines; comic books and movies. It is the world of the "new people", the *shinjinrui*, and its influence on both the aspirations of the young and the recruitment strategies of large companies is considered in the next section.

4.4 Coping with the labour shortage: Repackaging the company for the youth market

Large companies responded to the shortage of new graduate labour in a variety of ways. In addition to recruiting from rural areas, many companies suffering from the labour squeeze increased the numbers of part-time employees, and introduced year-round hiring (Japan Times, 3 May 1991). As noted in Chapter Two, section 2.5, there were some moves to try to retain female employees beyond the marriage and childbearing watershed, though with limited success, one suspects owing to less than whole-hearted commitment to this policy on the part of company management. In any event, the preference for hiring new graduate labour

persisted, and most companies' main response was to try and make themselves appear more attractive to potential recruits still in school or further education.

One common strategy was to improve the fringe benefits offered - for example by offering new recruits single room "dormitories" that are identical to private apartment blocks of self-contained studio flats, but at heavily subsidised rents and for the exclusive use of unmarried employees of the company.[12] This is a very attractive benefit even for Tokyo residents wishing to leave home, and still more so for recruits from the countryside. Tokyo rents for private accommodation are prohibitively high, particularly since "key money"[13] and a damage deposit are required, in addition to rent in advance. Altogether, anything from three to five months rent may be required up front before the tenant can move in. In addition, there is the cost of furnishing the flat, as apartments in Japan are rented unfurnished, and, in more modern buildings, the tenants may also have to bear the cost of installing an electric heating and air conditioning system.[14] For young people from poor families in rural areas, becoming a *seishain* of a Tokyo based company and thus qualifying for heavily subsidised company accommodation, with generally a minimum of essential equipment such as heating and a washing machine provided by the company, may be the only realistic way of moving to the city. In any case, for both rural and urban-based recruits, the quality of dormitory

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[12]The importance accorded this strategy by employers is evidenced by 1991 figures for housing starts, showing an overall slump of 20 per cent in June over the same month in 1990, but for the same period an increase of almost 50 per cent in construction of company housing for employees.

[13]"Key money" refers to a non-returnable payment by the tenant on first renting the flat. It is usually equivalent to one or two months rent.

[14]Some landlords insist on this, and prohibit the use of the cheaper oil-fired heaters on the grounds of fire risk.

accommodation offered by a prospective employer is an important consideration.

A less tangible, but perhaps more fundamental area that companies sought to address in order to resolve their recruitment difficulties was that of corporate image. The deputy director of a Tokyo-based company that researches into social trends in Japan, Hakuhodo Institute of Life and Living commented in 1991 that:

> It is becoming increasingly important for businesses to create good images from the point of view of securing manpower. Music and sports used to be popular tools, using high-tech to create amusement facilities to lure young people is a new trend.
> (H. Sekizawa, quoted in Asahi Evening News, June 16, 1991).

The same article that quotes Sekizawa refers to three companies, Fujita Corp (a construction company), Toyota, and Matsushita, which had attempted to improve their images by constructing virtual reality type amusement centres at their offices in Tokyo, with all the attractions open to the public free of charge. These centres had subsequently become popular dating venues for young people, and were also well-received by employees with young families, who liked being able to bring their children for a day out at their workplace. Another common way in which companies sought to improve their image which was widely reported in the press at the turn of the decade was by commissioning a famous designer to redesign the company uniform in a more modern style, or sometimes a choice of styles.

A plethora of articles and books appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s addressing the question of what it is that the new recruits seek in an employer, and what sort of image would appeal to the current generation of school/college leavers. League tables were also produced ranking the most popular employers, often producing different results from the more

established rankings by turnover or profitability.[15] These recent texts, most of them in Japanese and aimed at a Japanese audience, increasingly brought into question the representation of a uniquely Japanese system of management that had become widespread in the 1970s and 1980s, depicting employees as totally enveloped by the company, which acts as their family, and to whose greater good they willingly sacrifice their personal interests.

Newspaper articles bewailed the changing attitudes of the new generation of recruits, noting that these young employees increasingly sought to impose conditions on what sort of work they were willing to do within the company, rather than, as in former years, accepting whatever post the company allocated them to. Survey findings were regularly published purporting to measure the extent to which new recruits put their personal life before their company, generating articles with tiles such as "40% of New Recruits Refuse Overtime Work in Order to Have Dates" (Asahi Evening News, 16 July 1991). And the new chairman of Nikkeiren went on record in May 1991 as attributing the labour shortage to the "fact that people here just don't want to work anymore" (Mainichi Shinbun, 21 May 1991).

Tobin sums up the view expressed in the media as depicting the *shinjinrui* as "disrespectful, individualistic, selfish, uncommitted, and materialistic" (Tobin 1992b: 23). However, in Tobin's view, the last of these characteristics, that of being "materialistic" is the defining trait of the *shinjinrui*: he sees them as a generation driven by consumption, who construct their own identity and life-style in terms of the goods they buy, the places at which they shop, and the type of leisure interests they

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[15]For example, Seibu, a department store that is particularly good at playing the image game, was rated top among the large stores in a recent league table of good companies to join produced by the Nikkei Shinbun, Japan's economic journal. (Nikkei Business, 1989: 20) However, the same store did not even make the top ten retail companies in terms of sales in 1990. (Ryūtsū Keizai no Tebiki, 1991: 390-391)

pursue. In this scheme of things, the company for which one works is no longer the defining aspect of identity, as it was claimed to be for the previous generation by Nakane (1970).

The novels, dramas, and other products of popular culture associated with the *shinjinrui* often depict young people for whom work is a means to an end. It provides a pay cheque, friends, and an opportunity to achieve an urban lifestyle in which leisure pursuits are prominent. The subordination of work and company affiliation to consumption and leisure is highlighted by the popularity of the *arubaito* as a character in television dramas aimed at the *shinjinrui.* Often one of the leading characters may be a young man who has chosen not to be a *seishain*, and instead has opted for *arubaito* status work, for the freedom it bestows. This special sub-category of *arubaito* has been recently renamed *furiita* in Japanese, from the English, free. To the generation that was recruited before recession hit Japan, this type of free, uncommitted lifestyle, had become trendy, if not to follow oneself, then at least to admire from a distance, and perhaps to aspire to in the future.

With this consumer-orientated youth market in mind, the trend in Japan at the time that I conducted my fieldwork was to repackage companies to make them more attractive consumer products, offering not only employment, but also, ideally, a fashionable image and life-style. At the same time, numerous publications were produced assessing the relative merits of different companies, enumerating their defects, and suggesting how they should change. For example, in *Yoi Kaisha* (Good Company), a best-selling publication of the Nikkei shinbun (Japan Economic Journal) first published in 1989, the authors argue that Japanese companies need to change from "strong companies" (*tsuyoi kaisha*), driven by a desire to

increase market share, to being "good companies" (*yoi kaisha*). Whereas strong companies have a closed image, with a corporate culture of *"ganbarisumu"* (giving it all you've got) "goodness" (English word used in the text) is defined as a combination of traits. A good company must have a character that is at the same time universal (*fuhensei*) and individual (*dokujisei*), universal here meaning internationalist in outlook,[16] and individual meaning having its own particular character that differentiates it from its fellows. Most importantly, a good company, according to this analysis, is one that creates a happy atmosphere and motivates its employees by trying to see things from their point of view (Nikkei business 1989:9-23).

Individual companies attempted to revamp their image during this period by calling in corporate identity specialists to produce new logotypes and corporate brochures aimed at new recruits. In the creation of a new corporate identity, the designers would work from a list of key words embodying the image that the company wished to project. Some of the most popular words that recurred in this context were: *kokusaika* (internationalisation) *kosei* (individuality) or *dokujisei* (individuality, originality),*wakawakashisa* (youthfulness), and *yasashisa* (kindness, gentleness).[17] Individuality here refers to the individuality of the company, as compared to its rivals, but in corporate recruitment literature the theme of the company responding to the diverse needs of its employees as individuals also receives emphasis as explored further in section 4.5 below, contrasting sharply with English language depictions of Japanese

[16]There are echoes here of a wider preoccupation in Japan with "internationalisation". *Kokusaika*, the Japanese word meaning internationalisation, is a buzz word that crops up in most current writing on Japanese society, replacing the once fashionable *kindaika* (modernisation) (Goodman 1990).

[17]The data presented here is taken from briefing materials used by a firm of corporate identity consultants.

companies as primarily group orientated. Foreign loan words such as *dainamiku* (dynamic), *akutibu* (active), and *charēnji* (from challenge, but used to mean exert yourself) are also prominent, again emphasising the twin themes of internationalism and youthfulness. [18]

To examine further how this corporate repackaging was approached in the retail sector, I attended three seminars given by retail companies for university students in the 1991 recruitment round. These were given by companies which have sharply differing public images, despite operating in the same sector: Futajimaya, Seiyū and Itōyōkadō. In the seminars, these differences emerged clearly, but at the same time a common pattern was discernible, as I describe in greater detail in the next section.

4.5. Recruitment of University and Junior College graduates: Futajimaya, Seiyū and Itōyōkadō—a comparison.

Itōyōkadō - *tsuyoi kaisha?*

In some ways, the image Itōyōkadō projected in its seminar was very much one of strength - the *tsuyoi kaisha* as defined in the Nikkei work referred to in section 4.4 - both in terms of the context in which the seminar was held and its actual content. The venue chosen was Itōyōkadō's head office, an impressive tower block in downtown Tokyo, next to the Tokyo tower, with the initials IY on the front of the building, denoting the larger retail group of which the Itōyōkadō chain store is a part. On entering the building, signs directed applicants to different seminars taking place for recruitment to the Itōyōkadō chain and to the Seven Eleven chain of

[18] As noted in Chapter Three, foreign loan words are widely used by the younger generation in Japan.

convenience stores, the US holding company of which had recently been taken over by the IY group.

The room for the Itōyōkadō seminar contained several rows of desks and chairs, a television screen at the front, and a bookshelf at the rear with a large number of magazines and books about the IY group. On registering at the reception desk for the seminar, each potential recruit was given a large folder of information on the company through which we looked while waiting for the seminar to begin. This contained details of the scope of the IY group's operations; a brief history of its development; and news clippings concerning the takeover of Seven-Eleven's parent company.

The seminar began with a video, in which Itōyōkadō stressed its position as a market leader by showing league tables of profits for chain stores and for department stores, with Itōyōkadō heading both tables. Other notable aspects of the video were its references to the IY group's international standing, and its attempt to project a youthful, sporty image of the company.

The international credentials of the IY group were established by references to the Seven Eleven takeover, and also to a feature on the group which appeared in a Harvard University publication. The youthful image was conveyed through interviews with various young recruits who have already been promoted to senior positions — for example a young woman who graduated from Meiji University in 1988 and has become a manager, while numerous shots of company employees playing sports served as a reminder of IYs well-known sporting connections.[19] Perhaps to reassure

[19]Itōyōkadō has followed the example of the *depāto* in becoming sponsor of a nationwide sports team that bears the company's name - the Itōyōkadō volleyball team.

those who like the general image, but are not keen on being sales assistants for the rest of their working lives, the video also featured a run-through of the various different kinds of work done at the company — not only sales but also choosing which goods to buy from wholesalers (the role of the buyers), publicity and packaging, computer work, research on customer tastes and trends, and personnel training.

The video concluded with a brief speech from the company founder intercut with shots of the people featured earlier in the video, a shot of the entrance ceremony for new recruits and a speech by one of the recruits, and finally writing on the screen spelling out the aims of the IY group. The general feel of the video was confident and upbeat, with the clear message "Itōyōkadō has a bright future, and so will you if you join".

This was followed by a short talk from the recruitment officer running the session, in which he explained that the fundamental principle of retail is to respond to customers' needs. He told us that the IY group has become a market leader because of its research into what sort of goods customers want, and its sophisticated use of computer data to this end, combined with its policy of risk merchandising — i.e. not returning unsold goods to the manufacturer, as is standard practice in the department stores and many of the other chain stores. This enables Itōyōkadō to sell goods at lower prices while maintaining profit margins. Finally, he gave a rundown of working conditions, in which he stressed that the IY group encourages people to take their holiday entitlement and not to do too much overtime, so that they feel refreshed, and are better able to deal with customers. In this context, he noted that Itōyōkadō now offers employees two days off a week, but

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Encouragement of sports and the provision of good sports facilities for IY employees seems to be an important part of the Itōyōkadō image.

hopes in the future to increase this to three days.[20] Finally, we were all called out individually for interviews, and to answer any particular questions we might have.

Seiyū - *yoi kaisha?*

The Seiyū meeting was also held in a tower block belonging to the company, very near the Ikebukuro branch of Seibu, Seiyū's parent department store, in the northern part of central Tokyo. However, large parts of this block are let out to other companies, and part of it contains a shopping centre where people can wander in and out freely, so the impression on entry was perhaps less one of being confronted by corporate power. As at the Itōyōkadō seminar, we were handed a brochure on Seiyu to browse through while we waited, but the room in which the seminar took place did not contain any other reference material on the company.

The seminar itself was much more low-key, and featured a talk by one of the recruitment officers rather than a video. This talk too began by situating Seiyū in relation to its competitors, number three in terms of sales among the chain stores after Daiei and Itōyōkadō. But this time there was no comparison made with the department stores.[21] The speaker then went on to give a brief history of chain stores in Japan, pointing out the

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[20]Many companies in Japan still operate on a six-day working week, although an increasing number are moving towards the adoption of a five-day week. By 1989, 52.8 per cent of all companies and 82.7 per cent of employees enjoyed a five-day working week, if companies offering every other Saturday off are included(Nippon 91: 125). In this respect, employees of large retail companies have better than average working conditions, as in such companies a five-day week is standard, and one chain store has already adopted a four-day week in order to ease recruitment difficulties.

[21]This may have been in part because Seiyū is part of a retail group that includes Seibu, one of Japan's major department stores. Seiyū was started specifically with the aim of moving into the chain store sector, and it has never been part of its brief to seek to compete directly with the department stores.

difficulties the sector had experienced after the oil shock in 1973,[22] and how Seiyū had responded to them, and predicting further changes as a new era of fierce competition between the stores begins, following the changes in the law on large—scale stores earlier this year. In this context, he told us that Seiyū has chosen to diversify, and particularly to develop its cultural activities, opening cinemas, and producing films, plays and concerts. The company also plans to expand its publishing activities — it currently publishes a popular magazine called "lettuce club".

As with the Itōyōkadō seminar, the speaker sought to establish Seiyū's international credentials, telling us that Seiyū had a number of branches in South East Asia and intended to open a shop in Britain the following year. In contrast to Itōyōkadō, however, he stressed the importance of a greater awareness of health and the environment, for example through promoting recycling. As far as the retail sector in Japan is concerned, he noted the trend towards large out-of-town shopping centres, an area in which Seiyū plans to expand, while carrying out a refurbishment programme for its existing outlets.

Finally, he noted that Seiyū required flexible people who were willing to do a variety of different sorts of work. He emphasised that new recruits must be prepared to spend some time in sales, as this is the base of Seiyū's operations, so one should not enter with, for example, the idea of just working in the film section. Equally, experience is essential in order to

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[22]In October 1973, following a war in the Middle East, oil prices were increased, and oil exports from the Middle East to the non-Arab world cut back, with the United States and Japan suffering particularly severe restrictions. Although these restrictions were eased in December and lifted entirely the following March, the oil shock combined with other factors to trigger a recession coupled with high inflation in Japan in 1974, followed by a period of greatly reduced growth. This was especially traumatic as Japan had enjoyed more than twenty years of sustained high growth, averaging 10% p.a. , prior to the oil shock (for a more detailed account of the oil shock see Lincoln 1988: 25-39).

gain promotion, and this should not be expected to come too quickly —for example it is not realistic to expect to become a buyer in just five years. This talk was followed by interviews in groups of three, with women and men interviewed separately. This took quite a long time, as thirty-one people attended the seminar (as compared to two for Itōyōkadō), so a television programme on environmental pollution was put on to entertain us as we waited.

Seiyū succeeds in projecting a distinctly trendy image, and comes close to the Nikkei definition of a good company (*yoi kaisha*) in so far as its appeal lies more in its original character combined with internationalist aspirations (in the seminar I attended they were specifically targeting graduates with knowledge of Chinese or English who had also lived abroad to staff their overseas branches) than in corporate strength as defined by market share. And there is the added lure that its recruits may have the opportunity to become involved in its more glamourous "cultural" activities, a possibility emphasised in the design of the brochure it produced to give information about the company to potential recruits this year using a film-board as the central image (see illustration 4.1, overleaf).

Actually, this image is rather misleading — one of Seiyū's recruitment officers informed me that they did not in fact have any vacancies in the cinema or theatre divisions for 1992, although they did not intend to broadcast this information to the hopeful applicants. Seiyū is sometimes a victim of its own success in the image it projects — according to the same informant, some applicants have little or no interest in retail, and only

Illustration 4.1

Seiyū Recruitment Brochure for University Graduates 1991

apply in order to join the cinema and theatre divisions, often leaving shortly after entering the company in disappointment at finding themselves shop assistants. It was perhaps in response to this problem that in the talk described above the speaker repeatedly emphasised that retail is the base of Seiyū's operations, and everyone who joined should expect to spend at least sometime working in one of the chain store branches. I was also told that a number of applicants who apparently did not wish to work as shop assistants had been rejected at the interview stage.

The Seiyū and Itōyōkadō recruitment meetings differed sharply in style and in the images projected. For Itōyōkadō, the attraction was that of joining an efficient and profitable store, a leader in its field. Specific marketing methods were discussed in detail in this talk, whereas in the Seiyū talk the emphasis was far more on Seiyū as an innovator, a company moving beyond its sales base. The actual business of selling was downplayed by the Seiyū recruitment officer. However, in both cases a distinctive sense of company identity was conveyed, and both chain store groups compared themselves with their competitors in the retail sector and offered applicants reasons why their group was the most attractive option.

Itōyōkadō and Seiyū are both popular companies with new university graduates, regularly taking recruits from well-known universities such as Meiji, Hosei, Chuo and Nihon. These are not at the top of the university rankings, but are respected institutions nonetheless — it would probably be fair to refer to them as *niryū*, (second class) universities. Seiyū has even managed to attract a few graduates from the top ranking institutions (*ichiryū*) Keio, Waseda, and Japan's most prestigious university, the University of Tokyo. Their position is therefore quite different from that of Futajimaya, a company ranked well below them in terms both of market

share and of popularity with new recruits, and which in 1991 only managed to attract five graduates from *niryū* universities (Ritsumei, Nihon, Hosei and Chuo) out of a total intake of seventy university graduates, and none at all from *ichiryū* universities.[23]

Futajimaya

Even in terms of the context in which it was held, Futajimaya's recruitment seminar conveyed a much less impressive image than those of Seiyū and Itōyōkadō, as it was held in a rented hotel conference room. As at the other two seminars, a folder was distributed to all participants on arrival, giving a brief outline of the company's history and scope of operations and practical information on matters such as maternity leave provisions. The conference room was dominated by red velvet and one large television screen.

The meeting began with a thirty-minute lecture on the development of the retail sector in Japan, highlighting two main trends in the chain store sector over the last twenty-five years: firstly to provide a range of customer services, for example a travel agency within the store and an amusement park in Hokkaido named "Fantasy Dome"; and secondly to build more out of town shopping centres as these days more customers want to go shopping by car. The speaker also mentioned that Futajimaya had had a change of managing director three years ago (the present managing director took over from his father, the founder, who is now company president), and that at the same time a "New Futajimaya" had been launched, with the aim of making the stores more welcoming to customers

[23]My data on Futajimaya are the most detailed, as the company provided me with a photocopy of the complete list of new University graduate recruits in 1991 (for entry in 1992). Seiyū allowed me to look at their list briefly and jot down a few notes, but would not give me a copy of it, and for Itōyōkadō I was entirely dependent on verbal information from a company recruitment officer.

and introducing a more consultative style of management, not so much "one man", "top down".[24] Now, he said, all employees should take responsibility in the running of the stores, and the company has started taking regular surveys to elicit the employees' opinions. All sales assistants are representatives of Futajimaya, and should remember this, but perhaps only half actually do. He commented here that it is harder to change people's mentality (*kokoro* —literally, hearts[25]) than it is to change buildings. He added that Futajimaya training aims to change people's way of thinking. Significantly, given Futajimaya's low ranking, all comparison with other large stores was avoided during this talk.

Next came a ten minute video. The video first showed the range of goods sold by Futajimaya, and then showed a morning meeting (*chōrei*) of staff at a branch of the store. This was followed by an interview with an employee in which he emphasised the amount of responsibility he has, and how he has to think about and resolve problems by himself. Then came interviews with young employees in three other sections, one developing new goods, one in the policy department and one in the computer section. Finally all the interviewees were asked what sort of people they would like to see join Futajimaya, to which they replied "cheerful" (*akarui*), "someone who tries hard" (*torai suru*), "active" (*akutibu*), "lively" (*genki ga ii*).

This was followed by a talk on the theme "what sort of company is Futajimaya?" The speaker told us that Futajimaya is a warm and friendly company, where employees are judged by ability, and not on the basis of the University they attended — "It doesn't matter if you are a graduate of Tokyo University or of a university no—one's ever heard of." He also told us

[24]The speaker used these terms in English.

[25]*Kokoro* has a wide field of meaning in Japanese, and includes notions conveyed by the words heart, mind, and spirit in English.

that it was possible to gain rapid promotion, becoming section chief in as little as two years, with a corresponding increase in salary. He then gave a lot of detailed information on holidays, dormitory facilities, company union facilities, and discounted trips abroad for company members. Finally he gave a rundown of Futajimaya's "special features": the company is flexible, so employees can choose their own path of career development; there is room for failure, one should *charēnji*, (exert yourself)[26] try again; there is continuous training at all levels, including product research; the company provides for its employees' families, and will provide for their children in case of death; promotion is about one and a half to two times as fast as in other companies in the retail sector, and there are no *gakubatsu*.

The seminar was concluded with a talk given by a young company member who had joined Futajimaya two years previously. He said that before joining he had been to a number of seminars given by various companies in the retail sector, and had been struck by the difference between the Futajimaya seminar and the others. Whereas the other companies emphasised the security they could offer their new recruits, Futajimaya said that they had been having a lot of problems, but invited the new recruits to go forward with the company (*kore kara ikō* — let's take it from here).

He then talked briefly about the main skills necessary in the job —management of goods, ordering, and people (*shōhin kanri, hatchū kanri, jinji kanri*), and reassured his audience that the training they receive before starting work would teach them everything they needed to know. He

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[26] "*Charēnji*" is a popular loan word among Japanese advertising copywriters, and is often used in advertising of products aimed at the youth market. Although derived from the English word "challenge", in its Japanese usage its meaning is closer to "exert yourself".

praised Futajimaya's dormitories highly, saying that they didn't look like dormitories inside or outside, just an ordinary block of flats. He said he was particularly glad to have his own room. On the salary, he merely said it was OK, one could live on it, and on days off he commented that at first he didn't like having to work Saturdays and Sundays and take time off in the week, especially as this meant he couldn't meet old University friends. But he had got used to it, and now saw the advantages of having time off when everywhere is not as crowded as it tends to be at weekends in Tokyo. Finally, he said that Futajimaya responds well to its employees if they show enthusiasm (*yaruki ga aru to*), but "if you just want security it's not for you".

Lacking the obvious appeal of Itōyōkadō, a market leader; or Seiyū, with its fashionable image and media interests, Futajimaya attempted, in its recruitment seminar, to make the most of the assets it did possess, and even to turn its previously poor reputation in terms of management to its advantage. Its failure to attract recruits from high-ranking universities was re-articulated as an absence of *gakubatsu* and an openness to graduates of less prestigious institutions. And the unpopular managerial style of the founder and former managing director was balanced with an emphasis on Futajimaya's new start. There was also an attempt to cultivate a relaxed, informal, youthful style, notably through the use of a young recent recruit to give a speech style redolent of a *senpai* (senior) talking to his juniors from the same school about his experiences; the extensive use of foreign loan words; and the focus on young employees in the videos shown (even though the under twenty-fives make up a small minority of the workforce).

4.6 Recruitment brochures - or fashion magazines? The Futajimaya case

An examination of Futajimaya's recruitment brochures reveals similar characteristics to those discussed for the Futajimaya recruitment seminar. The girls' high school recruitment brochure (illustration 4.2) is designed in the same format as a girls' fashion magazine (illustration 4.3). The brochure is indeed described in English as, "Magazine for High School Students", although the Japanese in the right hand corner reads "1992 company entrance information." An international image is aimed at both by the use of English and with the title of the brochure, the Italian greeting "Ciao". The text reads like a paradigm of *shinjinrui* concerns with the following headlines (going from right to left): "Work to suit your style!" (*jibunrashiku shigoto shiyō!*); "In Futajimaya you can have fulfilling private time too!" (*Futajimaya nara, puraibēto taimu mo jujitsu dekiru*); "Document! The people of Futajimaya and their work" (*dokyumento! Futajimaya no hitobito to shigoto*); "Detailed check. Futajimaya is this kind of company" (*komakaku chekku. Futajimaya wa konna kaisha desu*).

Inside, the brochure continues in the same vein, still with a fashion magazine-type layout, and lots of colourful photographic illustrations. Most of these show young, smiling, Futajimaya employees, surrounded by montages of the various goods the chain sells. One section shows Futajimaya's leisure ventures, including the Fantasy dome, and another shows young employees pursuing some of the company-sponsored leisure activities. Prominent here are photographs of employees on company tours to the United States, and pursuing English lessons; and another picture on the same page shows an outside view of the company's most recently constructed dormitory block.

Illustration 4.2

Futajimaya High school recruitment brochure for girls 1991

Illustration 4.3

Girls' Fashion Magazine

The introduction to the brochure begins:

> Everyone has their own individuality. That's why having your own style is very important. Just like you express your sense of style through fashion, you want to express it through your work, too.

This focus on how Futajimaya can help its individual employees to express themselves and achieve their dreams continues throughout the brochure, with very little emphasis on the company, its organisation and development.

In the brochure for university graduates, on the other hand, Futajimaya provides much more detailed information about its organisational structure. These are the employees the company wants to keep, they are better-educated, and the company considers that they need, and can absorb, more information. The presentation of the brochure is also more sober - a plain white cover with the English words "New Futajimaya Mind Book" emblazoned in red and black across the centre, and a Japanese subtitle reading "Feel the New Futajimaya".

Nonetheless, the inside features numerous colourful photographs of Futajimaya's leisure ventures, and of young employees, so there is once again an attempt to emphasise the company's youthful character and involvement in leisure activities. The two pages reproduced in illustration 4.4 give a taste of the overall tone of the brochure, with the central photograph showing the managing director, casually dressed, sitting in a film director's chair,[27] surrounded by young *seishain* in relaxed poses. The large writing says, "With you, I want to take a 'feel good' direction". "Direction" is written as *direkushon*, a foreign loan word that suggests in

[27] Here, the Futajimaya brochure uses similar visual imagery to that used by Seiyū in their brochure design.

Japanese too a double meaning of orientation and film direction, thus again evoking a leisure orientated image calculated to appeal to the *shinjinrui.*

The leisure side of Futajimaya's business is also emphasised in the text, the first page of which explains that Futajimaya wants to make its customers fell good, through expanding into directions such as the amusement park it had recently opened, the annual musicals it had been sponsoring since 1988, its travel agency group, "culture school", and other unspecified future plans. The second page explains what Futajimaya is looking for in its new recruits in the following terms:

> We have only just begun to offer these services. A vast, unexplored terrain is stretching before our eyes. We are keen to open it up. To achieve this, we need people who can search out "feel good" things without being constrained by old ways of thinking. What feels good depends on the person. You have to search these things out one by one with a sensitive antenna. Everyone has such an antenna, but for us it is essential to keep it always polished and ready. Taking an interest in world trends, what kind of things, what kind of places, feel good for what sort of people? The basis of our work is to be sensitive to this and think about it continually. It is difficult, never-ending work, but there are many different ways of doing it, and it is interesting.
>
> Futajimaya now has many directors of the "feel good" factor, bringing "feel good" items from many different places we are beginning something new. I hope you will add your power to ours so that we can become more and more a "feel good" company. Won't you try to do your bit in Futajimaya?

For both high-school and university recruits, then, Futajimaya was carefully repackaged to appear modern, internationally-minded, open to new ideas, and welcoming to *shinjinrui* attitudes regarding fashion, lifestyle, and consumerism. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion in the university recruitment brochure that the company actively wishes to recruit these "new people" to harness their consumer sensitivities. The extent to which this strategy was effective in attracting recruits is, however, another question, that will be dealt with in the concluding section of this chapter.

Illustration 4.4

Excerpt from Futajimaya Recruitment Brochure for University graduates

1991

4.7. Conclusion

Despite the differences between the three seminars described here, some common trends can be detected which place all three in a common discursive mode that stands in sharp contrast to the Nihonjinron view of Japanese companies described in the first chapter. In place of the homogeneous Japanese corporate community beloved of the Nihonjinron, where all companies are seen as obeying the same structural principles; the individual character of each corporation is highlighted, with intense efforts to create a distinctive corporate identity.

In contrast with the prominence given in the Nihonjinron model to the excellence of "Japanese management", a more international image was suggested, particularly through the frequent use of English loan words to describe desirable qualities such as "*akutibu*" (active), a tactic that also tended to evoke a more youthful image, given the popularity of such words with the younger generation in Japan. In the recruitment brochures, too, the use of English words, written in the roman alphabet, was a striking feature.

Throughout, modernity and change were emphasised. In contrast with the Nihonjinron writers, who tend to stress notions of tradition and links with the past, Futajimaya's brochure actively solicited recruits who were not "constrained by old ways of thinking". Little was heard of self-sacrifice for the company, with the stress rather on the benefits the company could offer the employee. All three companies sought to position themselves in a favourable light for the youth market they were targeting, with Seiyū emphasising its media connections, Itōyōkadō stressing sports, and Futajimaya making the best of its lack of obvious assets by attempting to project an informal, youthful image, a relaxed company where even those

from low ranking universities would be given their chance (and attractive dormitory accommodation).

However, there remains the question of how these efforts to repackage the companies reviewed were received by those at whom they were directed. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview the participants in the Itōyōkadō and Seiyū seminars, owing to the fact that I had previously agreed with the companies concerned that I was to attend strictly as a "fly-on-the-wall" observer. For Futajimaya, on the other hand, I was able to interview both a few applicants and a number of recent recruits, both university and high school graduates.

As far as university graduates were concerned, many I interviewed largely discounted both brochure and seminar, except as sources of information on details such as working conditions and company benefits, such as dormitories. Reasons given for for applying to/joining the company by applicants and recent recruits to whom I spoke included: "I applied to Daiei but I failed their exam"; "I'm attending a new university, and we don't have any contacts with companies. So I want to go somewhere where they don't have *gakubatsu.* But I'm applying to Jusco, Seiyū and Itōyōkadō too." "My elder brother lives at home with his wife and children. It's really crowded and I just had to move out. Futajimaya has the best dormitories — everybody gets a single room." "Well actually I didn't have much choice. In the year I graduated not so many people were being taken on by the large stores as now, and this was the only place I could get into."

Among the high school graduates, however, a number had been impressed by the brochure, and particularly by the pictured dormitory building. In previous years, before the new dormitory near the Hatakeda branch was

built, this had occasioned some disillusionment among the new arrivals from the countryside when they first saw what was to be their living quarters:

> They lied. You write that down in your thesis, Matsunaga-san, they lied. In the brochure the dormitories looked beautiful, but when we got there they were so old and dirty some people left immediately. Now they have built the new dormitory it's better, but then...

I only had access to this kind of commentary on Futajimaya, by virtue of my close involvement with that company as an employee as well as researcher. However, I suspect that similar disillusionment may have occurred among recruits to other companies. One indication of this is the fact that Seiyū admitted to losing a certain number of employees every year owing to their disappointment at not being employed in the company's media related sections. For these employees, Seiyū's emphasis on its media links had perhaps been too effective.

Both the Futajimaya and the Seiyū case suggest a certain disjuncture between the way in which the company represents itself to potential recruits, who are still outsiders to the organisation, and the way in which the company appears from an inside perspective. A range of insider perspectives at Futajimaya are considered in Chapters Seven through Nine. But first, at the interface between these two statuses - that of courted potential recruit and that of company member - lies a period of transition, marked by the initial training and subsequent incorporation of new recruits. This period of transition, and the representations of company-employee relations with which it is associated, are explored next in Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Five

Becoming an Insider: 1. Training in Japanese companies

5.1. Introduction

The provision of in-company training is the norm for large Japanese companies. A 1987 survey shows that nearly 90 per cent of Japanese enterprises with more than thirty employees offer some sort of training to their staff, with the percentage highest (around 99 per cent) for companies with over 1,000 employees , and gradually declining as companies get smaller in size to a low of approximately 61 per cent for companies with between thirty and ninety-nine employees. (Ministry of Labour, Survey on Vocational Training in Private Enterprises 1987, cited in Nakamura 1988:122) This training may be of various types: on-the-job training (OJT) is important at all levels, and, depending on the firm, off-the-job training may also be provided at various stages of the employees' careers. But the area that attracts most attention, and absorbs the largest part of the company budget, is generally the induction training given to new recruits (Dore and Sako, 1989:83) .

The explanation usually offered for the preference for in-company training is that it is a logical concomitant of the lifetime employment system.[1] Large companies in Japan prefer to recruit new graduates, and are therefore recruiting for potential rather than for specific skills. Furthermore, male recruits, at least, are recruited as "generalists" rather than "specialists" (White and Trevor 1983), and may be expected to do a number of different jobs within the company in the course of their

[1]This is the line taken by official Japanese government publications, e.g. Nakamura 1988, as well as by most independent commentators, e.g. Dore and Sako, 1989.

careers. Throughout, the company provides all necessary training, secure in the knowledge that the investment thus made in their employees will not end up being lost to a rival company (Nakamura 1988). This argument has been further refined by Koike (1988) who suggests that where the skills required for the job have a high degree of specificity to the enterprise concerned, it makes no economic sense to recruit workers trained elsewhere, and, equally, the training received within the enterprise is not externally marketable.

Implicit to this view of company training is an apparently obvious assumption: training is equivalent to the transmission of skills. A different perspective, however, is offered by Rohlen (1970, 1973, 1974) on the basis of two periods of fieldwork, one carried out in Osaka at a large engineering company in 1965; and the second at a bank in Western Japan in 1969. Rohlen suggests that induction courses may best be understood as rites of passage, showing the characteristic tripartite structure described by Van Gennep (1960) of separation, transition, and incorporation:

> Separation being emphasized by travel to a remote dormitory and isolation there, change to uniforms, loss of money, and introduction to unfamiliar routines and the like. Transition occurs throughout the month as the individual is forced to adjust to the new and demanding situation by changing his perceptions, attitudes and behavior to group-centered company norms. The concluding ceremonies, where business suits are again worn and tension is released through beer drinking, a rugby game against the instructors and a campfire sing, serve to conclude the incorporation process and begin the process of return to everyday life.
> (Rohlen, 1970:188)

In support of Rohlen's view of induction training as, at least in part,[2] a rite of passage, a number of points can be made. Firstly, induction training is

[2]Rohlen does note in his account of training at the bank in Western Japan that a considerable part of the training programme was devoted to the transmission of technical skills. His contention is not that such transmission is unimportant, but

the rule in all large Japanese companies, whatever the level of skill required of the trainees. In Futajimaya, for example, a number of managers commented to me that the work of a sales assistant is distinctive in that it requires almost no skill, and indeed little or no training is offered to new part-time or temporary sales staff, who are expected to learn on the job, for the most part.[3] Nonetheless, all the new *seishain* recruits to Futajimaya attended the residential training course that will be described in this chapter.

Secondly, induction training courses in Japan commonly follow the pattern described by Rohlen of initial isolation in a company training centre that may be a remote location; followed by training that targets attitude and general behaviour as much as specific skills; and concluded by a ceremony marking the recruits' formal acceptance into the company. Futajimaya's induction training also followed this pattern, with the recruits first sent from their homes to the company training centre, and then after completion of the training formally accepted into the company in an entrance ceremony that is described in Chapter Six. Each stage of this process was marked not only by spatial movement, but also by other features such as change of dress, rules of behaviour, and change of formal status, as will be described in further detail below.

The most controversial aspect of Rohlen's account is probably that which concerns the content of the training programme. Rohlen (1973) argues that this aims to instil "group centered company norms", a process he terms *seishin kyōiku*, or" spiritual education". He gives examples of the way in

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rather that induction training also has a significance going beyond the question of skill acquisition.

[3]Some extra training programmes, usually lasting not more than one hour, were offered to part-time staff at the store. However, such courses took place very irregularly, and most staff began work with little formal instruction beyond a short introductory video.

which this type of training is pursued, spanning not only lectures on what is expected of employees at this company, but also activities that are less familiar to a Western European or American reader such as Zen meditation or military drills.

The extent to which this type of training was, or is, the norm in Japanese companies is questionable. Certainly, it has received much publicity outside Japan, but this is probably in large measure because it appears exotic, and therefore interesting, to a Western audience. Such publicity has not always been welcome in Japan, where such practices have a negative image for many, redolent of old-fashioned, pre-war, right-wing ideas. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, there were few companies in the chain store sector using methods such as Zen meditation, and none that were willing to admit to it.[4] Indeed, given the nationalist right wing connotations of *seishin kyōiku*, this type of training was viewed as old-fashioned even when Rohlen conducted his fieldwork, and Rohlen himself estimates that probably only about one third of Japanese companies used *seishin kyoiku* in 1973 (Rohlen, 1973: 1542). This proportion had dropped to around one quarter by 1980 according to figures quoted by Inohara (1990).

This decline in the use of the term *seishin kyōiku* and in the use of activities such as Zen meditation or military drills in Japanese company training does not, however, mean that companies are no longer concerned to modify the attitudes of their recruits, rather, this concern is likely to be expressed in different ways. A term frequently heard today in Japan as an alternative to *seishin* is *kokoro*, meaning heart/mind/spirit, which is free of the right-wing connotations of *seishin*, and was the term preferred by

[4]A publicity officer at the Japan Chain Store Association told me that a few stores did have such training programmes, but that they had asked not to be publicly identified.

the company at which I conducted my fieldwork.[5] It may be recalled here that a recruitment officer at Futajimaya commented in the recruitment seminar on the importance of transforming the employees' *kokoro*, and stated that the training programme aimed to change the recruits' way of thinking.

It can therefore be argued that in general terms, Rohlen's model of the overall structure and aims of induction training in Japan is still applicable, although the specific content of training courses may vary, as explored further below. And it would also seem that to characterise such training as purely concerned with the transmission of skills would be to neglect its wider social significance. If we accept the broad outlines of Rohlen's analysis there is a strong case for viewing induction training in a large Japanese company as a rite of passage.

The question may then be posed: a rite of passage from what to what? The transition emphasised repeatedly in the Futajimaya training course was that from *gakusei* (student) to *shakaijin*(member of society). *Shakaijin* is one of the words most commonly used in Japanese to mean "adult", but it also implies possessing the status of employee, as age in itself does not define this category. To illustrate, the legal age of majority in Japan is twenty, but an eighteen-year-old in employment is a *shakaijin*, she has entered society, whereas a twenty-year-old at college or university is still a *gakusei*. The company training course can therefore be conceived of as mediating a dual transition: that from childhood to adulthood, and also that from student to employee.

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[5]Both *kokoro* and *seishin* can refer to human beings' emotional, psychological and spiritual state, but *kokoro* is Japanese in origin, and has a less old-fashioned, right-wing feel than *seishin*, which is a Chinese import. Detailed discussions of the meaning of *seishin* can be found in Frager and Rohlen (1976), while Moeran (1984) discusses the meaning and usage of both *seishin* and *kokoro*.

This transition is not unproblematic: it brings into question the ways in which adulthood is constructed in Japan. The English term "adult" may be translated in Japanese as *shakaijin, seijin, otona*, or, perhaps less frequently, as *ichininmae*. All these terms have slightly different connotations. *Seijin* is perhaps the easiest to define, and the least frequently used in conversation. It is written in characters meaning "become person", and refers simply to those who have attained the legal age of majority, twenty years old. *Otona* refers to the attainment of a certain level of physical and developmental maturity, it is written with the Chinese characters meaning "big person",and is logically opposed to the word *kodomo*, meaning child. Unlike *shakaijin*, neither the status of *seijin* or *otona* imply that the person concerned is in employment.

Shakaijin and *ichininmae*, on the other hand, are rich in connotations. *Shakaijin*, as noted above, means member of society, and implies that this membership is gained through becoming a wage-earner and thus a contributor to society. It also has connotations of ability to take responsibility.[6] *Shakaijin* is thus pre-eminently externally and socially orientated. *Ichininmae*, on the other hand, is more inwardly orientated, and is often used to imply the achievement of a level of personal maturity that is measured subjectively, and may be attained at different points in the life course by different people (Kondo 1990).

The notion of *ichininmae* will be returned to in Chapter Seven, in the context of a discussion of gendered lifecourse expectations in Japan. In the

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[6]Because of the rich connotations of this word, there is a degree of flexibility in the way in which it is used. For example, in a conversation reported below, a Futajimaya trainer, talking about university graduate trainees and wishing to stress their responsible character as compared to the high school graduates, referred to them as already being *shakaijin* even though they were not yet in employment.

context of the induction training described in this chapter, the most important of all these terms for "adult" was *shakaijin*, a term that was the focus of a degree of contestation of meaning, particularly in the ways in which the notion of "taking responsibility" and the role of employment in adult life were interpreted by the company through its trainers on the one hand, and by the recruits on the other.

For many, if not most of the new recruits, the model of adulthood aspired to was that presented by the "*shinjinrui*" as constructed by the mass media, and discussed in further detail in Chapter Four (stars, television dramas, pop groups, and literature associated with the *shinjinrui* were very popular among these recruits). This construction of adulthood does not reject the notion of *shakaijin*, but rather redefines it. Responsibility means responsibility for one's own life, not necessarily responsibility towards others, externally imposed. And, as discussed in Chapter Four, employment is reframed as a means to enjoying more fulfilling leisure and personal life, rather than as subordination of self to company.

As was also described in Chapter Four, companies such as Futajimaya have sought to repackage themselves for the youth market, precisely in order to meet, or appear to meet, *shinjinrui* aspirations. However, at the same time, it would seem that the notion of company induction training as a means of changing recruits' hearts and minds has been largely retained. And this suggests at least a potential conflict between the expectations of the recruits entering the course, and those of the company. This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which the transition from *gakusei* to *shakaijin* was negotiated in the context of a Futajimaya training course for new female high-school graduate recruits.

5.2. Induction training: the Futajimaya case

I participated in one of four training courses held in March 1991 for new female high-school graduate recruits to Futajimaya. All three of these courses lasted six days, and were broadly identical - the reason for dividing these recruits into four groups was simply that the training centre was not large enough to hold all of them at the same time. Two other courses were also held: one for male high-school graduates, and one for graduates of tertiary education - mainly male, but also including six women.

Futajimaya offered me the choice of attending either the course for female high school graduates or the one for graduates of tertiary education. I chose the former because this type of recruit is in the majority in the Futajimaya group as a whole, and in 1991 provided six new *seishain* for the branch at which I was employed, as against two (one man and one woman) from the University graduates' course. I was told that the latter course differed mainly in that the participants were considered as already more adult (*shakaijin*), and it was therefore not necessary to be as strict with them: "You just tell them to do something and they get on with it". Also, their higher level of education meant that a faster pace was possible on the technical training side, particularly the part involving arithmetical calculations. The course for male high-school graduates has broadly the same content as that for their female counterparts, but is less popular with the trainers, who complain about the participants' wild behaviour - particularly at night, when they tend to smuggle alcohol into the dormitories and get riotously drunk.[7]

[7]Drinking is illegal until age twenty in Japan, though everybody, company superiors included, tends to turn a blind eye as far as eighteen to twenty-year-olds are concerned, as long as they do not get too out of control.

There were 120 participants on the course I attended, from all parts of Japan, stretching from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south. In addition there were six male trainers, who stayed for the entire course, and four female trainers, who arrived on the third day. The course took place in what could loosely be described as a distant suburb of Tokyo, although it is in fact in a different prefecture, in the company's own training centre, located about half an hour's walk from the nearest train station. It was opposite this station that the founder of Futajimaya opened his first store, back in the 1950s.

The trainees were all lodged in the training centre dormitories, as were four of the male trainers. Two of the male trainers stayed in a hotel near the station on a rota basis, a privilege to which they very much looked forward, as they complained that the dormitories were uncomfortable and overcrowded. Lack of space and a concern for my comfort were the reasons given for placing me in a hotel rather than the dormitory, and in fact I was unusually fortunate in having a very large and comfortable room to myself at the company's expense - the female trainers also stayed in a hotel, but had to share a room. For the sake of my research, I would have preferred to stay in the dormitory with the other trainees, but it did not seem possible to push this particular issue.

My status on the course was therefore somewhat peculiar - although I participated in all course activities on equal terms with the trainees, in generation and in the way I was treated I seemed to have more in common with the trainers. This ambiguity in my status worked against me in some ways, as the trainees tended either to avoid me or to treat me with exaggerated respect, but on the other hand I was able to establish a good rapport with the trainers and thus, perhaps, to see the training process

from more than one point of view. I was also, unfortunately, unable to attend the first day of the training course - the company deemed this unnecessary as, according to the manager responsible, it only consisted of checking that everyone had turned up who was supposed to and giving them a medical examination. As with the question of dormitory accommodation, I was in no position to insist. My account of the first day is therefore based on interviews with the training manager and with some of the trainees, as well as on my own observations of the first day of the subsequent course, which overlapped with the course I attended.

Day One

The trainees began to arrive in the late morning on the first day, all wearing smart suits, many in appropriately pastel colours for spring. The first task of the training staff was to check that all those registered to attend had arrived - often new recruits change their minds between accepting an offer of employment and the beginning of the training course. This time there were only three drop-outs, leaving 120 to attend the course. Since the trainees come from all over Japan they arrive slowly in twos and threes and there is a lot of hanging around in the ground floor canteen before the orientation meeting begins at 3.00 p.m. This is an opportunity for them to get to know each other, and also to size up Futajimaya's training centre, which in most cases seems to have made an unfavourable impression. One recruit told me much later:

> When I arrived I was shocked, it was so dirty and shabby. I just wanted to go straight home again. Everybody felt the same way.

The orientation talk lasted about forty-five minutes, and concentrated on explaining to them how the course would be organised: the daily schedule, and rules to be observed during the course. All trainees are given a

timetable (see Appendix Two); a list of rules for the course (see Appendix Three); and company textbooks for new recruits, covering company history, philosophy and organisation, as well as dress and etiquette codes and more technical matters such as gift-wrapping and basic calculations and paperwork. Following the orientation course the trainees were given a medical, and at 6.00 p.m. they had dinner in the centre's canteen. No activities were scheduled for the evening, giving them time to settle in and get acquainted with their room mates in the dormitories before lights out at 11.30 p.m.

Day Two

The next morning began with a wake-up call at 7.30, followed by breakfast. From now until the end of the course the pastel suits were put away, with all the trainees dressed in tracksuits, mostly the ones they used at high school. Roll call at 9.00, then a talk by the personnel manager at 9.20. I arrived shortly before 10.00 a.m., and went straight to the lecture room, where everyone was waiting for the next talk, an introductory talk on the company, to begin. I have transcribed my first impressions, as recorded in my fieldnotes, below.

> Training centre - shabby, grubby, dilapidated modern building, located in equally shabby suburb/corner of urban sprawl spreading out from Tokyo. Very unimpressive. Quite far from the station. Arrived shortly before 10.00 a.m., met by Mr Iwakura, went to sit in on talk. Murmurs of *gaijin,gaijin* (foreigner, foreigner). People I sat next to immediately walked off...During the break after the talk most people flopped forward onto the benches, everyone looked very tired. Tried to engage the girl sitting next to me in conversation, but she was very monosyllabic. This is going to be an uphill struggle.

At the beginning of this introductory talk, and all the others for the rest of the course, the trainer giving the talk called on one trainee to lead the formal greetings. All the trainees had already been allocated to a branch, and were addressed for this purpose as X-san of Y branch. The designated

trainee then stood up, at the same time saying, *"kiritsu, rei"* (stand up, bow), while the other trainees stood up and bowed in unison, then all saying together *"onegaishimasu"* (please). The leader then said *"chakuseki"* (sit down), and everyone took their seats. The importance of correct greetings was emphasised throughout the course, and in the introductory talk we were told that greetings were the first thing we had to learn:"Even if you can't do anything else, you must be able to greet customers in a lively manner with a smiling face".

Aside from stressing the importance of greetings, the trainer giving this talk was at pains to emphasise the change in the trainees' status from *gakusei* (students) to *shakaijin* (adults, members of society). Here there were clear parallels with Rohlen's account of the introductory talk at the bank training course he attended in which it was explained that:

> Our aim is to build you up as people so you can grow on your own once you leave here. That's the reason we have tough (*kibishii*) training. All of you are entering society for the first time. Cooperative living is different from the kind of living you knew in your school days.
>
> Your study here will also be different. In public schools, all you had to do was study for examinations. Whether you got along with your fellow classmates or not was not very important. Here, we have cooperative living as our style of life
>
> (Rohlen 1974: 200-201)

On the Futajimaya course, we were told:

> Until now you have been students. Now you are members of society (*shakaijin*), and you receive a salary...But your life has changed in other ways too. Before, maybe you had your own room, or shared with just one or two brothers and sisters. Now you have to stay in a dormitory. There may be eight other people in the room...Here, it's group living.

As a corollary of this change, they were also told they would now have to be more responsible:

> When you were at school, your teachers probably told you again and again to do something. Here you have three chances - we will only tell you twice.

Having made these basic points, the trainer moved on to give a brief outline of the Futajimaya group: its size; the scope of its business; the way in which Futajimaya, as a chain store, differs from the department stores; and finally the "vision" of Futajimaya, and the company's mottoes. At the end of this talk, we were told that for the rest of the training, we would be divided up into six *han*, or squads, each comprising twenty trainees. Generally recruits destined for the same branch were all placed in the same *han*, and I was allocated to the *han* of the Hatakeda recruits. For videos and lectures we would continue to all gather together in the main lecture hall, but for the remainder of the course each *han* was allocated its own small room and trainer.

When the trainer had finished speaking, he again called on a trainee to lead the greetings, which followed the same pattern of standing up and bowing, this time with everyone saying in chorus, "Thank you very much". As soon as the trainer had left the room, most of the trainees flopped forward onto their benches, apparently with the intention of using the twenty minute break for a quick nap.

After the break, lectures continued with two talks, the first on wages, health, and company welfare, and the second on a special Futajimaya in-house insurance scheme. By the end of the second talk, despite valiant efforts by the speaker to involve his audience through asking them questions and cracking jokes, the trainees seemed to have had enough, and started fidgeting and chatting among themselves. The lunch break seemed to come as a relief to all concerned, and the trainees trooped off down to the

canteen, duly turning and bowing at those remaining in the room on their way out, and saying *"shitsureishimasu"* (excuse me), as course etiquette demanded. I was told to wait and have lunch later with the trainers.

After lunch we returned to the lecture hall for a video on "workplace manners" (including timekeeping and rules designed to prevent theft by employees) , and the correct appearance of Futajimaya's female employees - hair neatly tied back if long; discreet make-up; no jewellery except for one plain ring and a pair of small ear studs; uniform correctly buttoned; low shoes. Introducing this video the trainer again commented on the recruits' change of status from students to adults, but this time stressing the continuity between school and company life:

> You might think rules are something from high school. Why am I working at a company if I still have to obey rules? But now you're getting a salary.

After the video, the appearance rules were gone over again, this time from the new entrants' textbooks.[8] The trainees read in turn from the textbook, mostly inaudibly, with many hesitations over the reading of chinese characters, and periodic pauses when the trainer told them to underline some especially important point. On make-up, the trainer repeatedly reminded them that Futajimaya is not a night club - make-up must be subdued. He also commented on their hair, which in most cases was long and loose, with many very long fringes in evidence. The main reason given for the strictness of the appearance code was that inappropriate make-up or jewellery might upset the *"oba-san"* (lit. auntie, used to refer to middle-aged women) customers.

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[8]As well as the written text of rules on appearance, the textbooks show pictures of what a Futajimaya employee should look like, with detailed annotations. The picture of a woman employee is reproduced in Appendix Four. This picture was prominently displayed in all the classrooms of the training centre.

We then moved on to the next section of the textbook, covering an area described as "manners at work". The most important points here were timekeeping - "five minutes etiquette", i.e. you should always be five minutes early for everything (also included in the rules for the course), and the rule prohibiting bringing valuables to work. Both of these rules were justified in terms of trying not to inconvenience fellow employees:

> If you bring valuables, or a large sum of money to work and it gets stolen it will cause bad feeling....If you are five minutes late back from lunch, and then the next person also takes an extra five minutes and so on, in the end the last person to go will have no lunch break left at all. So please think about the people you work with.

The distinction between work time and private time was also gone over here, with the trainer again pointing out that we get paid while we are at work, and it is therefore not the place to chat to friends about what we saw on television the previous night.

At this point the trainer broke off his talk, and, returning to the issue of appearance, abruptly told all of us to tie up our hair and remove our jewellery, "Now, immediately", and to keep it that way for the rest of the course. My fieldnotes record:

> Incredulity from the audience as it sputtered reluctantly into life. Looked at each other, muttered, did nothing about it. All trainers lined up at front, two went down the room handing out black hair fasteners to those with long, loose hair, or showy hair fasteners. Very reluctant to comply on hair. Looked round, paused, finally mostly complied. Then checked by senior trainer, those who still hadn't complied were told to.

Addressing the shocked, but now noticeably more awake, audience again, the trainer commented:

> The difference between school rules and work rules is that if you break the rules at school you can get away with it, but at work you

can't. You see, the rules are stricter than they were at school. And you thought, I'm an adult (*shakaijin*), I'm free.[9]

After a short break, another video and lecture slot concluded the large group session for the day. The video dealt with appropriate facial expressions, body language, and greetings when dealing with customers, first by showing how not to do it (film of a sullen, unsmiling sales assistant failing to greet an approaching customer, and then using abrupt and insufficiently formal language towards the customer), and then showing how it should be done. The correct way was then broken down, component by component, showing the correct smile; how to bow and what angles are appropriate to different situations; and the basic greetings to be used with customers. This video occasioned a lot of giggling in the audience, particularly in the sections showing how not to deal with customers and the part where the sales assistant pulled up the corners of her mouth to set her smile at the correct angle. As before, the lecture covered much the same ground as the video, but this time from the course textbook, with some additional elaborations, for example a gloss on the meaning of the greetings used when a customer enters the store (these are standard throughout Japan):

On customer entering store:
Irasshaimase (lit. welcome) I'm grateful you chose this store
On customer leaving store:
Arigatō gozaimashita (lit. thank you very much) Thank you very much, the money you spend here pays my salary

By the end of this talk several people were snoozing, and a few were sound asleep - this is, apparently, common on these courses, Suzuki-san had

[9]The equation of the status of *shakaijin* with freedom is one made by the trainees, and is in conflict with that offered by the company. In noting this alternative construction of adulthood the trainer is showing his awareness of the existence of two conflicting definitions, and is challenging the construction placed on the term *shakaijin* by the new recruits.

warned me that the afternoon session on the first day had a lot of videos and was pretty boring, and said that I could slip out if I wanted to.

After another break, we broke up into our *han* and moved to one of the smaller upstairs classrooms for the last session of the day. This was devoted to games, giving the trainees a chance to relax a bit, but with the important underlying aim of encouraging them to get to know the other people in the *han* and practise cooperating in groups. The trainer for our group was Mr Uenoyama, a sporty looking man in his early thirties with a Yakuza style tight perm[10] and a brisk, but friendly and cheerful manner. Like all the male trainers, and the trainees themselves, he wore a tracksuit throughout the course.

First of all we had a name-memorising game, where we all had to learn each other's names, and then divided into smaller groups of five or six to play more games, including a kind of bingo played with chinese characters, and games involving guessing each other's favourite pop star, film star and car. These games became quite animated, and the pop star, film star and car one in particular gave the recruits the chance to talk to each other about a topic in which they were all interested.

After the games Uenoyama-san announced which section of the store each of us had been allocated to, with the comment that it might not be what we had hoped for, but we shouldn't think "*yada*" (yuck).[11] We were then dismissed for dinner, after which I returned to my hotel, and the trainees set off to wander around the area near the training centre for a while before the 9.30 p.m. curfew.

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[10]This kind of perm is often worn by Japanese gangsters, or Yakuza.

[11]*Yada* is an all-purpose word for something one dislikes/does not want to do, used a lot by children and adolescent girls.

Day Three

The next day I arrived at the training centre at 8.30 a.m., and after a brief breakfast, joined the other members of my *han* in the main lecture room. They had been up since 7.00, in order to wash, attend roll call and do group exercises before breakfast. The *han* was then divided into three groups, with Hatakeda branch, a fairly large group of six trainees plus myself, forming one of these groups. We were told that these groups would be responsible for cleaning the lecture hall on a rota basis, starting this morning with the Hatakeda[12] group. My field notes record:

> Reactions to being told to clean ranged from unenthusiastic to appalled. Did it reluctantly, two did not do it at all, went and chatted with their friends in other groups instead. Those not on cleaning duty stood around watching and laughing.

By this point in the course, the trainees had begun to form groups of friends, generally within the same *han*, but sometimes cutting across branches. Within our *han* there were two main groups and one pair, with the others still apparently rather shy and isolated. Of these groups, one, comprising five Hatakeda recruits, was generally very earnest and hardworking; while the other, comprising two Hatakeda recruits, Harada-san and Miyauchi-san, and three recruits from another store, seemed to cultivate a more sophisticated image, disobeying as many rules as they thought they could get away with, and generally refusing to take the course seriously. The remaining pair, Nakamura-san and Araumi-san, who had been allocated to the same Futajimaya branch in a suburb of Tokyo not far from Hatakeda, constituted a world unto themselves, chatting and giggling animatedly together in low voices, but clamming up completely with other people, and doing as little as possible of the allotted course tasks.

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[12]The pseudonym I have adopted for the branch in which I conducted my fieldwork.

In due course, these two gained a certain notoriety, by leaving the company immediately on arrival at the branch to which they had been assigned - they simply redirected their baggage without opening it and took the next train home.

The fact that the Hatakeda branch was split in terms of friendship groupings puzzled me, and made things a little awkward from my point of view. Although often placed in the same group for the purposes of the course, Harada-san and Miyauchi-san distanced themselves from the others at every possible opportunity, frequently attaching themselves to their friends' group, and rejoining the Hatakeda group with obvious reluctance. It seemed more politic for me to attach myself to the more docile group, to avoid possible confrontations with the trainers (and in any case, I was so identified with the trainer/*oba-san* configuration it would have been hard for me to do otherwise), but I always felt I was missing out on an inside view of rebelliousness in trainees. I eventually discovered that that this odd split reflected the dormitory rooms to which they had been assigned - the more docile group all shared one room, while the others shared with another branch's recruits with whom they became friends. Although this split between the *otonashii* (good girls) and the others continued after we began work at Hatakeda branch, and was often commented on by the trainers at Hatakeda, the groupings later shifted somewhat when the room-sharing factor was removed.

At 9.15 the whole *han* assembled in our home classroom to complete various bits of paperwork and go over the tests that had been distributed to all new recruits before the course. There were two of these, one issued in December and one in February, to be completed with the help of information sent out by Futajimaya to the new recruits. The December test

was concerned with Futajimaya's corporate philosophy, while the February test dealt with the principles to be followed in order to get on well with fellow employees. Going over the tests, our trainer, Uenoyama-san talked about company philosophy and corporate identity, and gave the trainees some background on the company symbol mark and song. He also emphasised the importance of getting on with other people at work:

> You will find there are many different kinds of people at work. It's not like school, where you choose your own friends because you have something in common, you have the same interests. And you're all the same age.[13] You'll have to work with people you have nothing in common with, there are a lot of *oba-san* too [groans from the trainees]... try to find out about their hobbies, see their good points.

Finally, he stressed the importance of team-work, and told the trainees to think about the effect on other people of any failure on their part to carry out their allotted work.

The remainder of the morning was taken up by learning how to do gift wrapping - a service provided by all large Japanese stores. The main surprise for me here was the detailed instruction given on the symbolism of different types of *noshi* - special Japanese paper with bows drawn on it in different colours and tied in different ways. Since this paper is quite commonly used, I had thought that the recruits would be aware of what the different bows represented, but they were apparently just as ignorant in this respect as I was. [14]

After lunch came a two-hour session on fire awareness and training, beginning with a talk given by the manager responsible for the Kansai

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[13]Although the importance attached to senior-junior relations in Japan is well-documented, the link between classmates at school, that is, pupils in the same year, is also stressed, and even given its own special term, *dōkyūsei*. The importance of this type of relationship in the company context, between employees from the same intake, is explored further in Chapter Nine, section 9.5.

[14]Formal gift-wrapping in Japan is described in detail by Hendry (1993).

(western Japan) branches of Futajimaya. He explained he was in charge of this aspect of training because it was in one of the branches in his area that a serious and well publicised fire had occurred the previous year, killing several people. The main burden of his talk was that every member of staff should take responsibility personally for knowing what to do in case of fire, since, he pointed out, if a fire were to break out it would make no difference if you were a new recruit or not - customers would still turn to you for help.

This talk was followed by a video showing what to do in case of fire, including news-reel of two fires at large, well-known stores (but none of the Futajimaya fire), and fire prevention. Finally, we all trooped out to the parking area in front of the training centre for practice at using fire hoses and fire extinguishers. Practice was in separate *han*, supervised by members of the fire brigade, with all the other members of the *han* watching as each of us used the fire extinguisher.

As it was a bitterly cold day, it came as a relief to get back inside again for the final session of the afternoon, which was billed as the basics of dealing with customers. For this session all the male trainers were replaced by female "sales adviser trainers", of whom I had had a sneak preview as I sat in the trainers' staffroom, killing time in the breaks between sessions. The SA trainers, as they were referred to, varied in age from early twenties to (I would guess) late forties. When they arrived, they all looked quite different in dress style, make-up, and general manner, but by the beginning of this session they were transformed into the image of the perfect sales lady, uniformed and groomed accordingly, in sharp contrast to the much more casual-looking male trainers.

The SA trainer for our *han* was Mrs Koyanagi, one of the older women, very elegant and poised even in her casual wear, and possessed of an unwavering smile. After introducing herself in the approved style (I am X branch's Koyanagi), she told us that she wanted to begin by hearing a three-minute speech from each of the trainees, telling her something about themselves, their families, and their schools. We were given five minutes to prepare.

Perhaps unfortunately, the first two called upon to speak were the introverted pair described earlier, Nakamura-san and Araumi-san. Nakamura-san managed a twenty-second speech by the trainer's watch, and thereafter merely giggled, despite being forced to remain standing for the full three minutes. The trainer took this unpromising start calmly, simply telling her that it would not go down well at the store at which she was to work if she was so quiet. Koyanagi-san then said she would reduce the length of the speeches to one minute for that day, but that she expected everyone to make a five minute speech the following day. She then asked Nakamura-san to speak for another forty seconds. Nakamura-san remained standing, but continued to giggle without speaking. Finally she was allowed to sit down.

Araumi-san also failed to speak for a full minute, managing only forty seconds. The others improved somewhat, mostly managing the minute, but very shy and giggly. All the speeches followed the same pattern:
"I have two sisters, my bloodtype is O,[15] I come from Niigata...oh dear, what shall I do..." One unusually long and self confident speech was given by one

[15]In Japan, bloodtype is thought to be related to personality, and asking about bloodtype is a popular ice-breaker when trying to get to know someone, much as asking about one's star sign might be in Britain.

of the earnest Hatakeda recruits, which made all the rest of the *han* giggle even more.

Koyanagi-san, the *oba-san* now in charge of training these young women watched calmly and without comment, except to tell them how long they had spoken, until they had all had their turn. She then told them that they should remember two things, firstly to keep a smiling face at all times, and secondly to speak clearly.

> Please remember to look bright and cheerful. Remember your mother's face when she came to greet you at the door when you returned home from school. If she wasn't smiling you wondered what was wrong.
> Most of you were speaking quietly, and some of you were mumbling. If you do that at work no one will hear you or understand you.

We then moved on to the next part of the session, elocution, with Koyanagi-san drawing a chart to show how Japanese vowel sounds are produced and then getting us to recite the Japanese syllabary in chorus, concentrating particularly on getting everyone to open their mouths wide enough to enunciate clearly.

After this, Koyanagi-san tackled our non-smiling faces, by drawing a smiling face on the board. She said that it had eyes like bananas and a mouth like a melon. She then asked one of the trainees what her favourite food was, and, failing to get an answer, asked another one the same question. The second girl finally replied after conferring with a friend. Very slowly, she got answers from most of the *han*. She then told us all to think about our favourite food, and how we feel after eating it, and smile. We then had to smile at each other in pairs, checking our partner's face to see if she had a sufficiently bright smile. No one took this very seriously, although there was quite a lot of involuntary smiling as everyone was giggling. Concluding this practice by telling us that a smiling face is very

important when dealing with customers, especially when we can't comply with a customer's request, as they are more likely to accept "I'm sorry that's not possible" when it is said with a smile, Koyanagi-san allowed us a ten-minute break.

After the break came more elocution practice, this time concentrating on intonation and voice projection, aiming particularly to erase certain intonation patterns that are characteristic of high-school girls, but deemed inappropriate to polite young sales assistants. Koyanagi-san also gave an impressive demonstration of the different sorts of greetings appropriate to different workplaces, from the bellow of the fish shop employee to the soft voice of a hospital nurse, situating the Futajimaya greeting somewhere between the two. Finally, we learned the prescribed ways of standing, walking, and bending down to pick things up, and the different angles of bow appropriate to different work situations. We also spent quite a long time practising the correct bow for greeting customers at the beginning of the day. As with the *noshi* session, I was surprised by the ineptitude of the trainees, given that bowing is such an everyday feature of Japanese life. Few could bow with a straight back, simply flopping forward awkwardly, and this required a lot of practice before Koyanagi-san considered us passable.

After this session I had dinner with a group of the trainees for the first time, and was able to find out something about their reactions to the course. They all said they were tired, and found the course harder than being at high school. The talks made them sleepy, and their feet and backs hurt after the physical exercises. No one evinced any enthusiasm - and this was the "earnest group".

Later, I had a second dinner with the trainers, and was surprised to hear from them that the reticence and apparent shyness of the recruits was quite usual. One of the most outgoing of the women trainers said that she had been extremely shy when she joined, but that her ten years working at Futajimaya had changed her, especially her experience working as a political campaigner (under duress) for a candidate fielded in the Hatakeda area with the support of the Futajimaya company union. After that, she said, no one could be shy again. Suzuki-san said that he was of the opinion that perhaps only 10 per cent of the current batch of trainees would ever be of much use to the company, but that was true of all these (implicitly, female high school graduate) groups - this batch was no better or worse than the norm. Conversation then strayed to more personal matters, as the trainers took advantage of all being brought together from the branches at which they usually worked to catch up on each other's news before the women turned in for an early night and the men went on to do some serious drinking.

Day Four

The next morning at 9.00 a.m. we were back in the classroom with Koyanagi-san, preparing five minute speeches to give to the rest of the *han*. To help us, Koyanagi-san suggested topics we might cover in our speeches, for example, why did you choose this company? What section did you hope for? Those who had friends prepared together, the others sat in silence.

When they came to give their speeches the trainees all did better than they had done on the previous day, though there was still a lot of mumbling and giggling, rendering some of what they said completely inaudible. The most common reasons given for wanting to join were that Futajimaya's

recruitment material looked good; that there were one room dormitories; and that it was easy to get into. Other reasons given included salary; holidays; teacher's or *senpai's* advice. Only two of the group mentioned having visited the store for shopping, and liking it.

A number of the trainees commented on how exhausting they found the course, but perhaps the most surprising speeches came from the two who had been so tongue-tied the previous day, Nakamura-san and Araumi-san. They both said they found the training strict, that they didn't have enough free time, and that they thought the course didn't suit them.[16] Araumi-san wound up the session by saying she wanted to go home.

Koyanagi-san seemed quite unperturbed by all this, smiled, and said that she supposed everyone joined for similar reasons:

> I joined because the salary was good. I went to the Osaka branch, and in my intake there were ten university graduate men, and ten high school graduate women. My husband was one of the ten men. We got married, we've had four children, and my husband has been transferred four times. I follow him when he is transferred. So, you may join for one reason, but what you end up getting from the company may be quite different. You never know what the future will bring.

This seemed quite an astute speech, as it both identified Koyanagi-san with the trainees in terms of attitude towards the company (at least on joining) and held out a view of a rosy future including a successful marriage and children (still very much the social norm for Japanese women) under the auspices of the company. For once, Koyanagi-san held the entire *han's* attention, and there was no giggling.

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[16]The words used in Japanese were: *seishintekini awanai* - it doesn't suit my temperament, it doesn't suit me on a *seishin* level, an interesting choice of words given the resonances of *seishin* in Japanese.

After the speeches we had more practice in elocution and bowing, culminating in a paired role play on taking goods and money from the customer and then giving back the change. This was followed by further gift-wrapping practice before we broke for lunch. After lunch we had a technical lecture on dealing with credit cards and other necessary paperwork, and then spent the rest of the afternoon in a sports session described in our timetables as "Do! Sports".

For "Do! Sports" all the *han* trooped off together in a straggly crocodile to a sports hall about fifteen minutes walk from the training centre. Once there, we assembled in lines by *han* and did aerobics, following two guest instructors standing at the front. The general response to this was very unenthusiastic. We then chose which of two types of ball game we wished to play, and competed by *han*, with half of each *han* in one competition, and half in the other. This went in rounds up to a grand play off, and most people seemed to enjoy it and really tried hard. There was little interference by the trainers, who simply refereed and kept the score, and two of our *han*, Nakamura-san and Araumi-san, managed to sneak off undetected (at least by the trainers) and didn't participate at all.

After the finals, and formal announcements of how well the different *han* had done, we returned to the training centre and broke for dinner, then assembling again in our separate *han* at 7.00 p.m. for a free question time with our supervisor. Most of the questions concerned the dormitories: their layout; the curfew, and whether it was strict or not; and whether they could have friends to stay or not. This prompted the supervisor to ask if they meant male or female friends, to giggles all round, immediately leading on to another trainee asking whether there would be any male *seishain*. Finally, the supervisor gave us our schedule for our first week as *seishain*

after completing the training course, and handed out materials to prepare for the next day's training. At 8.00 p.m. we were free for the evening, and the other trainees wandered off window shopping around the centre, while I returned to my hotel.

Day Five

The last full day of the course was mainly devoted to technical training: basic arithmetic necessary for sales; the images conveyed by different colour combinations and how to create effective displays of clothing using these; and specialist training for the section to which we had been allocated. The colour sense session was tested immediately afterwards, and there was also a competition in which we all created our own colour combinations and were then judged by our fellow students.

By this point in the course the trainees were all looking very tired - two failed to turn up for the morning session, according to their friends they had caught cold and were staying in bed. And in a break in the afternoon session eighteen of the twenty members of our *han* flopped forward onto their desks and went straight to sleep. As it was raining, the course organisers decided to cancel the scheduled evening trip to the local branch of Futajimaya, giving us all a welcome free evening.

Day Six

The final day began with a test of how much we had understood of the course. This was not very strictly supervised, giving plenty of opportunity for conferring, and we then marked it ourselves. After the break, our trainer briefed us on the branches for which we were destined, store organisation, salary, holidays and career prospects.

One notable point in this briefing was a warning about possible problems with the *pāto*:

> You're *seishain*, so you'll get a higher salary than the *pāto*, even though they have more experience than you do, and they're older. So they may resent you and bully you. Please watch out. Just say "yes, yes" like sweet little girls when they say something to you

And on promotion: "Try to make it to section chief. You can do it in four years"(Greeted by sniggers - feeling of "we're not going to stay that long").

> Try to bear it for three years. Think: if you can do three days you can do thirty days. If you can do thirty days, you can do three months. If you can do three months, you can do three years.

Finally, the trainer emphasised the importance of gratitude, and asked the trainees to write to their teachers and thank them for everything they had done, and to telephone their parents when they arrived at their designated store. We then had a break before assembling in the main lecture hall at 11.30 a.m. to sing the company song. This was by way of practice for the graduation ceremony, which would be held for all the new entrants all together the following week. Schedules for the ceremony, company handbooks, and song sheets were handed out to the trainees, who were now all in a relaxed mood, chatting and laughing in informal groups. The song itself was sung rather half-heartedly, with the trainees drowned out by the tape recorder that was put on to accompany us. The head trainer then summed up the main message of the course: remember to give lively greetings.

After lunch, everyone went off to the dormitories to pack, and changed out of the tracksuits they had been wearing throughout the course, replacing them with the formal pastel coloured suits they had worn on arrival. We then assembled again in the main hall with our bags, waiting to be picked up by representatives from our respective branches and driven to our future workplace and home (which in most cases the recruits had never seen before). Everybody was chatting happily in the groups that had

formed during the course, and many seemed sorry it was over in so far as they would have to say goodbye to friends they had made who were going to different branches. There was also a lot of excited speculation on who would pick them up (inevitably a male *seishain*) and whether he would be handsome or not. The names of those due to pick us up were announced, which gave me the opportunity to shine with the Hatakeda group by telling them all about the (young and handsome) man who would be collecting us.

In point of fact, the Hatakeda group were treated to no less than two attractive young male escorts, as there were too many of us to fit in one car (the men sent to collect us had to drive their own cars down for the occasion). This caused quite a stir when the trainees first spotted them, followed by shy silence for most of the long drive back to Hatakeda. The two young men were very friendly and did their best to chat to the girls, taking us all out first for coffee and then for a tour of Yokohama and the Yokohama bay bridge on the way back.

5.3 Arrival

We got to the branch late, delayed by traffic, just after the store had closed. We drove into the goods entrance and went up in the very dirty and shabby elevator reserved for staff use to the office floor, where a welcoming committee consisting of the deputy branch manager, floor managers, and one female member of the office staff in her late twenties introduced as *dai-senpai* (senior *senpai*) were waiting. The corridors on the way to the office were lined with posters welcoming the new arrivals, one for each new recruit, showing a drawing of her and messages to her from the other *seishain* working on her floor (none of whom had previously met her).

The girls were then given their new Futajimaya uniforms, and formally introduced to their floor managers by the deputy store manager, who also said a few words welcoming them to the company. The two young men allocated to take care of them then took them all off for dinner before taking them to the company dormitory, while I was buttonholed by various *seishain* who had been hanging around in the hopes of seeing the new intake and asked what they were like.

My direct involvement with their grand entry to the Hatakeda branch was interrupted rather abruptly at this point, as now the course was over and we were all back in Hatakeda the general expectation seemed to be that I should hurry home to my husband and child - in any case the trainees were looking rather tired, and perhaps in need of a quiet evening without the company of a nosey visiting anthropologist. The formal rites of incorporation into the company (graduation ceremony, welcome parties, formal introductions to the rest of Hatakeda branch staff and the customers) only took place a few days later, as the new recruits were given two days off to rest and settle into the dormitories. These ceremonies are described in the next chapter.

5.4. Training for adulthood: a world of contested meanings

In assessing this training course, it is important firstly to bear in mind that it was a course for women, of whom the company expected relatively little, by the trainers' own admission. At best, it was hoped that a few of them might stay for long enough to become section chiefs, but in any event none of them were expected to make a lifetime commitment, and is is therefore not surprising that there was no attempt to convert them into

"company women" in the way that Rohlen describes for the two all-male training courses in which he participated (Rohlen 1970, 1974). The furthest the course went in this direction was to give them an outline of the company history and philosophy, and one half-hearted rendering of the company song.

However, this does not mean that the training course renounced all attempts to change the hearts and minds (*kokoro*) of its participants. Rather, such efforts were concentrated towards the transformation of the recruits into the company's definition of *shakaijin*, responsible adults who would serve society through their service to the company, for as long as they might be employed there. One important element in this attempted transformation was the focus on group activities and group living: for example, the shared dormitory rooms; the division into *han*, who were made responsible for tasks such as cleaning; and the team sports in the Do! Sports day. In the lectures, too, much was made of the importance of cooperation in groups, even when those groups might not be of the recruits' own choosing, and might include people with whom they had little in common.

Another important element was the emphasis on rules, and suppressing personal inclinations for the sake of others and for the company. Some examples given of this were the importance of coming back from lunch on time for the sake of fellow employees, and following the company dress and make-up code so as not to upset middle aged female customers. Also in the vein of suppressing personal inclinations in favour of wider corporate concerns, it was emphasised to the recruits that they could not have likes and dislikes, but must fulfil all their allotted tasks, and should accept whatever section of the company they found themselves allocated to without complaint. The language used here is of interest - *yada* (yuck) was

used by the trainer to indicate complaint, a word used by children and young women, with a childish feel contrasting implicitly with the status of *shakaijin*. Finally, it was emphasised on a number of occasions that they would be receiving a salary, and that the acceptance of corporate rules and obligations was the corollary of the acceptance of the salary.

All this stands in marked contrast to the representation of employment at Futajimaya found in the high school recruitment brochure examined in Chapter Four, which a number of recruits cited as their main reason for choosing to join this company. For example, it may be recalled that the introduction in the brochure spoke of the importance of finding "work to suit you" (*jibunrashiku shigoto*), a notion that seems in contradiction with the company announcement on the training course that recruits would have to accept whatever section they were allocated to, even if it was not the one for which they had hoped. Overall, there was a marked shift, therefore, from the individual-centred, *shinjinrui* -style brochure, to the group-centred discourse of the training programme; with a concomitant shift from an emphasis on company benefits and leisure activities, to an emphasis on obligations to fellow employees and to the company.

How, then, was this course experienced by the recruits? Later, some of them recalled nervousness, mainly at being, for the first time in their lives, brought together with other young people from all over Japan. As many of them were from distant, rural areas, they had been used to speaking in their local dialect, and were particularly nervous about speaking in standard Japanese in front of a large group. This in part accounted for their tongue-tied performance when asked to address their group. However, this nervousness with each other faded fairly rapidly, as they began to make friends and establish common interests. All those to

whom I spoke recalled the breaks between lectures and classes as the best bit of the course, and after the course had ended they looked forward to the company social occasions which would give them the opportunity to meet again those with whom they had made friends who had been allocated to other branches.

Another common recollection was one of disappointment and disillusionment. The training centre shocked them by its shabby, dilapidated appearance, after the glossy, modern impression conveyed by the recruitment brochure. Nor had they expected the course to be so strict, rule-bound, and tiring. Most of them complained of exhaustion during the course, and many of the rules, such as those concerning hair-style, were widely resented, and resisted. One issue in this context was their expectations of their new status of adulthood. As the trainers observed during the course, the recruits thought of this as heralding a new freedom, not the imposition of restrictions that would be more strictly enforced than in high school.

For those recruits who had requested allocation to a branch in Tokyo, far from their native homes,[17] joining Futajimaya was a means of accessing the independent urban lifestyle of which they had seen so much in television dramas. Their work was a means to an end located in leisure and consumption, and their salary a means of acquiring the indispensable material adjuncts of their desired lifestyle. In this context, they had little or no interest in the background information that was offered them on the company and its philosophy, and few could recall it later. Rather, they directed their energies to comparing interests and tastes, exchanging

[17]This was not the case for all recruits: Futajimaya has an extensive network spreading throughout Japan, and some recruits applied to join branches to which they could commute from their parental home.

information on current trends, and discussing what type of up-to-the-minute consumer electronic goods they would purchase for their longed-for one room company apartments.[18]

In so far as the company managed to connect with these sorts of concerns in the training course, it succeeded in capturing the recruits' interest, as their animation in the session devoted to identifying favourite stars of popular music and film showed. Other topics that gained their attention included Mrs Koyanagi's account of how she met her husband - boyfriends and marriage were universally part of the recruits' images of their own future lives, reflecting in this instance more general Japanese constructions of femininity, as will be explored further in Chapter Seven. And, finally, when allowed to ask their own questions, the much publicised dormitories and rules governing curfew and guests came top of the recruits' concerns.

However, for much of the rest of the course, the recruits made plain their boredom and lack of involvement by fidgeting, giggling, dozing, and simply not doing what they were asked. In this, they seemed to be pursuing a passive sort of resistance to the agenda the company had laid down for them reminiscent of the tactics identified by Scott(1985) as characteristic of resistance strategies among relatively powerless groups. This contestation of the meaning of the transition marked by the training course was not resolved during the course, and the tension between the way in which the transition to *shakaijin* was envisaged by the trainees on

[18]The importance for young Japanese people of acquiring certain types of consumer goods, and of acquiring up-to-date information on what is, and is not, fashionable among their contemporaries is explored by Merry White in "The Material Child"(1993).

the one hand, and the company on the other, also underlies the ceremonies of incorporation into the company, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six

Becoming an Insider 2: Discourses of Becoming

6.1 Introduction

Although on arrival at the branch the new recruits had become *seishain* (or full company members) of Futajimaya, for the first six months of their employment they had a special status within the larger group of *seishain* - that of *shinnyūsei*, literally, newly entered students. This status was proclaimed in large bright green chinese characters on the name badges they wore on their uniforms, and, as a group, they were generally referred to by this term by other employees.[1] The status of *shinnyūsei* marks a state of incompletion in the sense that their training was not complete at this stage - a further six months of on-the-job training awaited them - so in a sense it can be said that they were not fully incorporated into the company until the end of this period.

However, ceremonies and informal celebrations acting as rites of incorporation to mark the entry of the *shinnyūsei* to the company began with their arrival at the branch. These can be divided into two categories: formal and informal. The main formal rite of incorporation was the entry ceremony to the company as a whole, with two other ceremonies marking entry to the branch and to the local community respectively. On the informal side, a series of parties were held for the new recruits: a branch

[1]During this period, they were further marked off from other *seishain* by a rule obliging them to take all their meals on working days in the company canteen for the first two months. This is an option that is open to all *seishain*, but is generally only taken advantage of for the midday meal by women staff, with only the unmarried male *seishain* and the *shinnyūsei* staying on for the evening meal. All the women in the 1991 intake complained bitterly about this rule, on the grounds that the food was horrible, and gave up taking their evening meals in the canteen as soon as they were allowed to do so.

party, a floor party, and a cherry blossom viewing party with the branch manager. A dormitory residents' party was also planned, but never took place as the dormitory chief was unable to book a large enough place to hold the party in. In this chapter, the formal and informal rites of incorporation are described, and this is then followed by a consideration of the light these ceremonies may throw on the issue raised in Chapter Five of rival constructions of adulthood in contemporary Japan.

6.2 Formal rites of incorporation

The principal of these was the entrance ceremony to the company as a whole, as it was this that marked the transformation in the status of the new recruits. For this reason I have singled it out for detailed description below. The branch and neighbourhood ceremonies were much less elaborate, with the branch ceremony simply consisting of the formal presentation of the new recruits to the monthly meeting of *seishain* on the first Sunday of the month, which happened to fall on the day after they completed their three days on-the-job training at the branch. I was unfortunately unable to attend the neighbourhood ceremony, but I was told it consisted of a gathering of all the new recruits of large companies in the Hatakeda area, who were then addressed by the mayor of Hatakeda. I was unable to discover anything about the content of the speech either from the new recruits or from those who had attended in previous years - it was universally dismissed as simply boring (*tsumaranai*) - though this assessment in itself may tell us something about this type of formal ceremony in Japan, as I shall discuss further below.

The entrance ceremony

The entrance ceremony was held five days after the initial training course in which I participated had finished, and although this was the formal marker of completion of initial training and entry to the company, my fellow-trainees had in fact already been welcomed to the Hatakeda branch and had completed their first two days of employment.[2] The reason for this delay was that the large number of new recruits necessitated doing the initial training programme in batches, and the entry ceremony could only be held once all the groups of trainees had completed this process.

On the appointed day, all the new recruits, male and female, high school and university graduates, assembled in the civic centre of Futajimaya's home base, the suburb where the store began its operations, not far from the company training centre. Male and female alike were dressed in suits, dark colours for the men and spring pastels for the women. We were required to be at the centre by 12.30 p.m., necessitating an early start or even an overnight stay for those who had completed their training earlier and were travelling from the more distant areas of Japan.

Once at the centre, we registered with reception, and were each given a booklet setting out the order of events for the day, and listing all the new

[2]The remainder of the five-days interval were free days to enable the new recruits to buy what they needed to furnish their unfurnished dormitory rooms. These purchases were largely made from Futajimaya stores, using the Futajimaya staff discount. Money for the purchases was advanced by the company where necessary, but in many cases the recruits' parents provided for their setting up costs. These were nowhere near as high as those incurred by most people in Tokyo renting in the private sector, as essentials such as a washing machine and air-conditioning/heating were already installed in the dormitory rooms at the company's expense. The biggest item to purchase, and that which occupied most of the recruits' discussions on the subject, was a television/video unit. How to afford this purchase did not seem to weigh greatly on their minds, judging by the fact that none of them took me up on my offer of a free second hand television, preferring to go for one of the latest models instead. It did not seem that setting up costs constituted a significant financial burden for any of them.

recruits, divided by branch. Also included were the company motto and the text of the company song, and several blank pages which we were later told to use to make notes on the speeches given by the president and managing director of the company respectively. After this, we went to the main hall, where we were seated by branch and geographical area. The recruits were also divided by gender, with the men at the front of the hall.[3] At this point, the atmosphere was quite animated, as the recruits took advantage of the opportunity to chat with other recruits who had attended the same training course, but had been allocated to different branches. However, the chatting was soon curtailed, as we were drilled by the training managers on our bowing - in the actual ceremony, shortly to commence, we would be called on to stand up and bow in greeting to the company president and managing director.

Finally, at one o'clock, the ceremony began. The curtain concealing the stage at the front of the hall was raised, revealing a podium flanked by two benches at which senior company officials were seated, with a backdrop consisting of the Japanese flag on one side and the company flag on the other, while these in turn were framed by banners. The topmost banner read "Entry Ceremony to Futajimaya Ltd., Heisei year 3",[4] while the banners on either side showed the Futajimaya company mottoes. One of these banners showed the"management vision": "to be loved by the customer, and to aim to be a diversified general merchant", while the other showed the three slogans that summarise Futajimaya's corporate aims:

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[3]The seating plan was decided by the company. Segregation by gender is not unusual in Japan, nor is the practice of "men first". In my daughter's kindergarten in Japan, whenever the children were all gathered together in the main hall they lined up beforehand in their classrooms with all the boys going in first, ahead of the girls in their class.

[4]1991 in the Western calendar.

Expand - network of kindness
Join together - network of trust
Extend - network of competitiveness

There was also a small stand for announcements on one side of the stage, and this was now mounted by one of the training managers, who announced the day's order of events, and introduced the company's president and managing director, who were seated at the right hand side of the podium.

The first event was formal greetings from the new recruits to the company president and managing director. For this, the names of the geographical areas into which the store's branches are divided were called in turn, at which both male and female recruits from that area all rose, and one male and one female representative mounted the stage to greet the managing director, who was now standing at the podium. They each received a certificate from him stating that they were now employees of Futajimaya, which he handed to them bowing, and saying, "*ganbatte kudasai*" (please do your best). The representatives answered, "*hai, ganbarimasu*" (yes, we'll do our best) and then all the recruits from that area bowed in unison. As each recruit received his or her certificate all the officials on the stage clapped, except for the company president, who simply took notes. One girl slipped and fell on her way to the platform, prompting an outbreak of gasps and giggles, with mutters of "*kawaisō*" (poor thing).

After the greetings were over, we all resumed our seats to listen to speeches by the company president and managing director. The company president spoke first. He began by telling us that we were now *shakaijin*, and had to change our way of thinking from that of *gakusei* (students) to *shakaijin* (adults and members of society). He then introduced himself, explaining that he was the founder of the Futajimaya group. He told us his age - sixty-

eight years and ten months - and said he supposed he was probably about ten years older than our fathers. He then went on to give us an outline of his own and Futajimaya's history.[5]

> I started out when I was twenty-three, with very little money. The first store I opened was right here, it was a clothing store called Oasis. Now the chain has 10,737 employees. Isn't it amazing how things have grown? Do you know why Futajimaya is called a chain store? It's because a chain[6] has lots of links, and Futajimaya has lots of stores.
>
> Maybe I will only be able to meet you once or twice a year, so please listen to what I am going to tell you. I've written a book about my life, it has 360 pages and it's become a best-seller.[7] I wasn't very good at school, I failed University entrance and was a *rōnin*[8] for three years. I don't try to hide this because I think people's failures are interesting. Please read my book, then maybe you can understand Futajimaya a little better.

Drawing on these experiences, he told us that there were three key points we should remember: firstly not to approach life in a self-indulgent way; secondly that suffering while young led to happiness later on; and thirdly that there was no such thing as being lucky. He concluded his speech by urging us all to put our whole energy into living.

This was followed by a speech by the managing director, a post at that time filled by the founder's son. Like his father, he told us his age - forty-four - and said that he was probably about the same age as our fathers. He emphasised the importance of gratitude: that we should be grateful to our parents; our teachers; our seniors; and our siblings, both older and

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[5]The following section of the speech is a reconstruction of the founder's words made with the help of my own notes and those of another *shinnyūsei*. It was not possible to take a verbatim account, as I was not able to use a tape recorder during the ceremony.

[6]The term chain store is used in Japanese as a foreign loan word, so by no means all people know the meaning of chain. The president therefore translated chain into Japanese *(kusari)* for the benefit of his audience.

[7]Here he gave us the name of the book.

[8]A word denoting someone who has failed University entrance and is studying to re-sit it.

younger. He then stressed once more the distinction between *shakaijin* and *gakusei* touched on by his father in the previous speech.[9]

> From today, you are all *shakaijin*. The life of a *shakaijin* and the life of a student are fundamentally different. From today you have become *shakaijin*. And you have also become Futajimayajin (Futajimaya people).[10] From now on, you must always take notes of what your superiors tell you, you will find that otherwise you will forget. As *shakaijin*, this is common sense. What have you all written in your notebooks on page four?[11] Now turn back to page three. Did you write anything? Maybe it doesn't matter now, but it will matter in a year's time.

This galvanised a number of the audience into picking up their pencils and starting to take notes in the space provided in our booklets. Having thus ensured himself of our full attention, he then announced the numbers of new recruits this year, high school and university graduates, male and female, before returning to the theme of the differences between *shakaijin* and students.

> As students, you had many rights (*kenri*), and few duties (*gimu*).[12] But now you are receiving a salary. As *shakaijin*, you have many duties and few rights. As a student, whatever you achieved was a result of knowledge plus action. However, as *shakaijin* action becomes much more important, so what you achieve is the result of knowledge times action. Knowledge in and of itself is far less important as a *shakaijin* than at school, you must above all learn how to use your knowledge, how to put it into practice. For a *shakaijin*, knowledge should be reflected in actions.
>
> Do you know how much the company will pay you if you stay until the age of sixty? If you are a man, probably about 200 million yen.

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[9]As for the president's speech, the following is a reconstruction of the speech from my own notes and those of another *shinnyūsei*.

[10]The word used was a compound of Futajimaya and *jin*, the word for person, people.

[11]Here, he is referring to the notebooks that were distributed to us on arrival. Pages four to seven of the notebook were left blank, with instructions to use them to take notes on the managing director's speech, while page three was reserved for notes on the president's speech.

[12]The notion of *gimu* has been widely stressed as central to the Japanese value system in writing on Japan, notably by Benedict (1946). It is, however, an unpopular word with younger Japanese people, who see it as old fashioned. As will be explored further below, *gimu* is part of a discourse that is seen as being at odds with the aspirations of the *shinjinrui*, and is rejected by those identifying with the *shinjinrui* construction of adulthood.

> Some people repay the company with 100 million yen, some with 50 million yen. These people will not do well in the company. Think about it.

He then moved on to a consideration of the mental or spiritual qualities that would be required of us in our new role.[13]

> You must not be guided by your personal likes and dislikes. You won't be able to do your job if you make these distinctions. There will be customers you like, and others you don't; tasks you like, and others you don't. When you're a student it's alright to only try hard at things you like, but it's not alright now that you are *shakaijin*.
>
> You must take responsibility for your own self-discipline.[14] Up until yesterday, you received guidance from your parents and teachers. Now everyone thinks of you as a *shakaijin*, so you must take responsibility for your own actions. You will get little or no guidance from others, so be grateful to those who do give you guidance.
>
> Make good use of your time and money. You have 115 days holiday a year, and your salary is between ¥100,000 and ¥200,000 a month.[15] How are you going to use this? If you spend your time watching television you are wasting your lives - think what else you could do with the time, for example you could use it to study something. And concerning money, some people get themselves into debt, which causes a lot of problems. Please be careful about this.
>
> Learn your job as quickly as possible. Ask your superiors about anything you don't understand. How should you learn your job? This is a very important point, so I shall go into it in some detail. Think about learning to drive: if you sit in the back seat, you'll never learn. It's the same at work. You have to try to do it yourself. When you ask questions about something, make a note of the answers. Sometimes you will try to do something and fail. That's OK, but don't fail twice. If you fail twice it's OK, but don't fail three times. If you fail three times it's OK, but don't fail any more. One of my favourite

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[13]The words used in Japanese were *kokoro no junbi* - literally, preparation of the heart, although, as discussed in Chapter Five, *kokoro* is also commonly used to mean mind and spirit.

[14]In Japanese, *jibun o shitsukeru no wa jibun de aru*. The use of the term *shitsukeru* is interesting here, as it is a key word in the discourse of child rearing in Japan. It cannot be readily translated by any single word in English, as it expresses the notion of molding the child's character to make it into a social being, but without the negative connotations of the English term "discipline". For a detailed discussion of this notion, see Hendry 1986: 11-14

[15]Salaries on entry vary according to the recruit's educational level - university or high school graduate.

> comic books[16] is about a girl who keeps failing in her attempts to become a stewardess, but never gives up. Don't be afraid of failure.

He then moved on to a consideration of male and female employees within the Futajimaya group. He commented that men and women were equal but different, and said that he therefore proposed to talk about them separately. On women, he pointed out that there are many women employed in retail, and that a number of different career paths were available to them within Futajimaya. He said he hoped they would progress within the company, and told them that they could achieve a responsible position within the Futajimaya group.

Turning his attention to the male recruits, he considered the question of how they could make it to the top posts within the company.

> There are only a small number of top posts available. So how do people make it to the top? The first essential quality is strong leadership: the kind of attitude that says "I'll do it, leave it to me." Secondly, you have to like people - this is fundamental to retail. Thirdly, you should have a cheerful, optimistic disposition.[17] I know you all drink sake and beer. If you think when you've drunk half your beer, "Oh, I've still got half a bottle left", that's a good way of thinking. In the same way at work, there are two sorts of people, those who think, "I've finished half my work now, I'll do my best for just a bit longer"; and those who think, "Still half left to do..."

In the concluding part of his speech, the managing director told us always to remember that our salaries came from the money spent in the stores by

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[16] Reading comic books (*manga*) is a common pastime in Japan among both children and adults, and one can often observe businessmen on their way to work absorbed in a comic book. For the managing director of a large company in Japan to talk about his favourite comic book is therefore less incongruous than it would be in England, but it is nevertheless an astute touch in so far as comic books are firmly part of popular, youth culture, and claiming to be a comic book reader de-emphasises the distance between the middle-aged managing director, who is also a graduate of the University of Tokyo, and his audience, composed in the main of eighteen year old high school graduates.

[17] The expression used in Japanese was *ne ga akarui*, which literally means "a bright root". One way of classifying people in Japanese is into those with a bright root (optimistic, cheerful) and those with a dark root (pessimistic, gloomy). This is the contrast to which the managing director was referring.

the customers, and that if we offended the customers in some way and they ceased to come to the store, this would inevitably affect our pay. He then noted that over the past two days 1,170,000 people had entered companies (in Japan) as new recruits, 130,000 of them in the retail sector. Of those, we 650 had chosen Futajimaya. To us, he addressed a final present, something to remember:

> Where does happiness come from? It does not come from the north (*kita*), it does not come from the east (*higashi*), it does not come from the west (*nishi*). It comes from *minami* . This is not *minami* meaning south, but *minami* written with the characters for *mina* (everyone) and *shin*, or *mi* (body).

With this slightly enigmatic comment (which was not understood and/or taken in by all the new recruits), presumably referring to the importance of mutual cooperation, the managing director left the podium, and we proceeded with the programme of events.

The next event was the formal introduction of the remaining dignitaries on the stage, and then a brief answering speech by a representative of the recruits, affirming that we had now become *shakaijin*, and we pledged our best efforts to the company. After this, we all rose and sang the company song[18] in chorus - although it was sung fairly half-heartedly, and punctuated by giggles in the group in which I was standing.

At last, nearly an hour and a half after the beginning of the ceremony, the stage curtain was lowered again, and we were given a fifteen-minute break, in which the recruits resumed their unfinished conversations with friends from other branches, swapping impressions of the work so far, the dormitories, the sections to which they had been allocated. I half listened to these conversations, while thumbing through my programme of the day's

[18]The text of the song is given in Appendix Five.

events, checking my notes on the speeches with the girls sitting next to me, and wondering what the "Entry to the company festival", billed next, was going to be like.

To my horror, having been busily imagining all sorts of entertainment, and, hopefully, food, the curtain rose again to reveal yet another speaker. He was briefly introduced, and we were told to take notes, after which ensued a forty-minute talk that seemed interminable, and excruciatingly boring. I surmise that I was not the only one to feel this way, judging from the background of fidgeting, chatting, and mutters of *tsumaranai* (boring) that became increasingly audible as the talk progressed. Some of the recruits quite openly went to sleep at this point, while the majority of those sitting near me who appeared at first glance to be industriously taking notes were in fact, as a closer look revealed, merely doodling. I think that at this stage, after an early start and a long journey to get to the site of the ceremony, most of the participants had reached saturation point.

The speaker began by congratulating us all on our entry to the company, and saying how much he envied us all, as he remembered the day that he had joined. Much of the speech reinforced points already made by the managing director, for example on the importance of gratitude, but in a more verbose and informal style, liberally illustrated with anecdotes of the speaker's own experiences as a new employee at the company, and drawing on a wide range of ideas from both Japan and the West, covering areas as diverse as *un* (fate) and biorhythms. He spent a considerable time discussing basic character differences among each year's batch of new recruits, dividing them into two main categories, the enthusiastic, active type (*ii kandōsha*), and the "cool"[19] type. Many of his anecdotes served to

[19] This word was used in English in his speech.

illustrate why it was better to be enthusiastic and active. Finally, this speaker alone addressed the women in the audience directly, telling us that the company wanted not just our labour, but our ideas - the female way of thinking. As an example of this, he cited some female entrepreneurs who started a successful delivery service specialising in small items. In the same way, he told us, we should all try to develop our own individual small themes, as the sum of many small things can create something worthwhile.

This last speech, sprinkled with jokes and featuring many foreign loan words, seemed calculated to appeal to a youthful audience. It was perhaps unfortunate for the speaker that it came at the end of a long day, when most of us were past the point of being able to take in very much. With the conclusion of this speech the curtain was lowered again, and we were free to disperse. No other entertainment was laid on, and there was no area where we could freely mingle and catch up with each other's news. In addition, nearly everyone faced a long journey back to the area in which their branch was located, although the fact that we would all have the day off the following day was taken advantage of by some to return to their parents' home for a brief visit. In any event, we all headed for the train station, most people now looking tired, and glad to get away.

6.3 The wider context: company entrance and discourses of socialization in Japan

In assessing the Futajimaya entrance ceremony and attempting to put it into some sort of comparative context, a number of approaches are possible. The most obvious is to compare it with other company entrance ceremonies, in Japan and elsewhere. From this perspective, the form of the

ceremony follows a familiar pattern for large Japanese companies,[20] and one that distinguishes the company from both firms in Europe or the United States, and from smaller companies within Japan, where such ceremonies are not standard practice. Notable features include speeches by top company management, responses by the employees, the singing of the company song, the display of the company flag and mottoes, and the statement of the values that the company sees as important in its employees. The theme of becoming a *shakaijin* is stressed again and again, as are notions of duty (*gimu*) and gratitude (*kansha*).

Seen in this way, the entrance ceremony becomes part of the wider configuration "the Japanese employment system". It is an occasion when the official representation or ideology of this system - familism, the importance of hierarchical relations, the company enveloping its members lives - is at its most explicit. [21] And the main distinguishing factor of the Futajimaya ceremony is its cut-price, slightly slipshod air in comparison with the big productions mounted by major Japanese firms - the ceremony held in an obscure suburb rather than in the prestigious central Tokyo venues favoured by, for example the large Japanese banks, and the absence of any sporting events or big celebratory displays, or even food following the ceremony.[22]

However, where this perspective is, it seems to me, misleading, is that it focuses on the representation of the company by the senior management who are organising the ceremony, without asking how the ceremony

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[20]Rohlen (1974: 35-40) has given us a detailed description of the entrance ceremony to a Japanese bank in Western Japan, which follows a very similar pattern to the one I have described.

[21]This is the view taken by Rohlen (1974: especially 43-49).

[22]In contrast, at the bank described by Rohlen the entrance ceremony was followed by a banquet for new recruits and their parents.

appears to, or is experienced by, the participants. Rohlen sidesteps this issue, saying that:

> belief ... [in company ideology] ... is not the basic issue... in the Uedagin case proper conduct as a participant in the group is the more important consideration. Both the safest course and the highest virtue lie in keeping still about personal opinions that contradict public ideology.... It is in the nature of the Uedagin ideology to be vague and agreeable. People have a hard time having a strong opinion about it either way, so full is it of conventional platitudes."
> (Rohlen 1974:55)

Rohlen goes on to seek "indirect confirmation" that the company ideology is based on consensus by asking company employees at various levels "whether idealism and a sense of values are necessary aspects of business management" - unsurprisingly, they answered in the affirmative - and by citing various consultative activities within the company as evidence that "a wide variety of people [are involved] in the formulation and expression of the official Uedagin ideals." (Rohlen 1974: 55) Part of Rohlen's problem here, is, in my view, a function of his relationship with the company he studied and its employees. He was not permitted to work at the company, and his status remained that of privileged outside researcher throughout. As such, I think it predictable that he would hear mainly *tatemae* responses to questions about the bank's management and philosophy - statements of how things are supposed to be, rather than how they are actually experienced by any given individual. Also it seems to me that his question regarding the importance of ideals in business suffers from the same vagueness and unexceptionable quality that he attributes to the Uedagin statements of company philosophy.

Unfortunately, the tendency for both researchers and popular writers to assume that management ideology in Japan is uncritically absorbed by the workforce has become quite entrenched, and, in its extreme form, leads to charges of virtual brainwashing. For example, Van Wolferen (1989), a

journalist who has been based in Japan for over twenty years, sees the repetition of corporate ideology at this kind of occasion, and activities such as singing the company song as all part of a process that, rather than being based on initial consensus, tends to achieve consensus by merging individual identity with that of the group:

> The passionate clinging to the symbols of the firm, the founder and the corporate ideology; the singing of the company song... all are symbolic acts designed to reassure the employee of his membership in the company and of its nurturing powers. The symbols, though abstract, are immediate and familiar. The trite phrases, repeated like incantations, dull the critical faculties.
>
> (Wolferen 1989:168)

However, returning to the entrance ceremony at Futajimaya, and re-examining it from the participants' point of view, the first point that strikes me is the conspicuous absence of any signs of "passionate" involvement, at least among the women (I was seated too far from the men to observe their reactions). The female recruits to Futajimaya giggled, fidgeted, doodled, chatted amongst themselves, and generally appeared to take less and less interest in the proceedings as the afternoon wore on. Asked a year or so later what their memories of the day were, most claimed to be unable to remember much, if any, of the ceremony, while one of the more enthusiastic women recruits (with whose help the above account was compiled) summed up this and other formal rites of incorporation as *katakurushii* (meaning formal, but with the connotation of stiff, rigid, starchy), and making her feel tense *(kinchoshiteiru).*

This lack of enthusiasm can be interpreted in a number of ways: as peculiar to the company concerned (owing to its lack of prestige and general state of decline); or as conditioned by the gender of the participants I observed most closely - as women with no long-term stake in the company they could perhaps hardly be expected to feel or display much emotion at being formally accepted as *seishain.*

However, I think another interpretation is also possible: again looking at the ceremony from the point of view of the participants, it should be noted that it is a less than novel experience for them, in fact it follows a form familiar from entry ceremonies to the various levels of the education system in Japan, from day nurseries and kindergartens upwards. This is not just true of its overall form, but also of its content and the moral values it promotes. These are part of a wider discourse in Japan concerning the transformation of children into social beings, and eventually to *shakaijin*. This transformation takes place in several marked stages, with the company entrance ceremony marking in one sense the completion of the process, although other markers of maturation still await.[23]

If we shift our perspective, therefore, from focusing on companies to focusing on the mechanisms for entering a range of social institutions in Japan, the company entrance ceremony appears less as a momentous single event in an individual's life than as yet another in a series of ceremonies that they have already experienced on a number of occasions. The form and content of the ceremony follow a pattern so familiar to the participant that they scarcely seem to merit attention or description, prompting remarks such as that on the neighbourhood induction ceremony "Oh, it was boring", or, when pressed as to the content of the mayor's speech "Oh, he just said the usual things." The ways in which the company entrance ceremony can be seen as part of a continuum of ceremonies beginning in

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[23]For high school graduates entering the company, their legal acquisition of adult (*seijin*) status at age twenty still awaited, with the accompanying ceremonies. Another important transition is marriage, although this is not synonymous with the acquisition of adult status in Japan, for either men or women. Rather, there is an interval between becoming a *shakaijin* and marriage which provides the arena for a distinctive construction of young adulthood, an area that has been touched on in discussions of the *shinjinrui*, and will be explored further below.

early childhood is explored below through an examination of an analogous ceremonies in Japanese day nurseries and kindergartens.[24]

6.4. First formal rites of becoming: kindergarten entrance and Japanese notions of socialization

My attention was first drawn to the similarities between kindergarten and company entrance by my own experience in April 1991,[25] when my daughter entered a day nursery in the same week that I attended the Futajimaya entrance ceremony. In the case of my daughter's nursery, new entrants and their mothers all assembled in the centre's main hall, where we were greeted by the head of the centre and assembled staff. In the main, the mothers were formally dressed in suits. Formal introductions of the head and staff were followed by a short speech by the head of the centre, welcoming our children, and explaining the philosophy of the centre. After this, older children, already enroled in the centre, presented the new entrants with a small gift as commemoration of their entry. Hendry describes a similar entrance ceremony for the kindergarten she studied, with the addition of the singing of the kindergarten song, the reading out of the new pupils' names (to which they all responded with *hai*, meaning yes, or, in this context, present), and the taking of a photograph to commemorate the occasion (Hendry 1986: 140).

The form of these ceremonies - introductions and a speech or speeches by officials of the institution that one is entering, and, in the case of the

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[24]I use the term day nursery here to refer to the Japanese *hoikuen*, which provides care for the children of working mothers during office hours, and is open to children from the age of three months to six years. Kindergarten refers to the *yōchien*, which are open to all children aged over three and under six on the 1st of April, when the Japanese school year begins. Admission to *yōchien* is not dependent on having a mother who works outside the home.

[25]All entry of pupils to schools and of *seishain* to companies normally takes place at the beginning of April.

ceremony described by Hendry, the singing of the song of the institution which one is joining - seem closely analogous to the company entry ceremony, although on a smaller scale, an analogy also noted by Tobin (1992a) in his analysis of a Japanese kindergarten. What then of the philosophies of these apparently very different institutions?

Here, a distinction must be made between day nurseries and kindergartens, in that the former cater for children below the socially significant age of three (of which more below), and are therefore seen as having a more nurturing role than is the case for kindergartens. For these tiny children, the value of free play is stressed above all. In contrast, when we consider kindergartens the parallels with the company philosophy outlined above become more evident. The responsible ministries, in their guidelines for day nurseries and kindergartens, state that one of the main aims for both is "to introduce [the children] to group life in preparation for entry into primary school" (Hendry 1986: 60). This adaptation to group living does, however, receive more emphasis in the kindergartens.

Visiting a local kindergarten for their recruitment meeting in November of 1992, I listened with interest to the speech made by the head of the school explaining his school's philosophy. He explained that although free play was very important to children, they also had to learn the basic discipline essential to daily life - for example, it is now time for lunch, so put your toys away. Free play, he said, was essentially analogous to the concept of *kenri* (rights), whereas the discipline needed for daily life came under the heading of *gimu* (duty). Only by a combination of these two could a child develop to the maximum of its potential. In the first year of the nursery school's programme, attention would be paid to developing the children's ability to follow rules, and co-operate in the daily life of the

school, and from this base subsequent development/education of the child could take place.

Tobin (1992a) has argued that in kindergarten Japanese children learn to distinguish and shift appropriately between "outside" and "inside" orientated behaviour, formality and intimacy, the public and private self. While at some moments of the kindergarten day, free, unrestrained play is allowed, including fighting between children which would be forbidden in a British nursery; at other times behaviour must follow a highly formalised, prescribed pattern, for example during formal greetings in the morning. He also describes ways in which awareness of the larger group is fostered, for example by collective exercises at the beginning of the school day (as was the practice during the Futajimaya training course), and notes that kindergarten children learn to identify themselves as members of X class, in a similar way to the pattern Nakane notes of adult company employees identifying themselves as members of X company. From my experience with my elder daughter's kindergarten, I would add to this that the children are also introduced to the idea of gratitude to their parents through the practice of reciting in chorus before lunch every day, "Thank you mother and father for preparing my packed lunch."

It would seem, therefore, that a number of notions that feature in the formal discourse of company employee relations are introduced far earlier than company entry. Some examples of this are the contrast between *kenri* and *gimu*, and the shift from a life dominated by *kenri* to one dominated by *gimu*; the concept of *shitsuke* , or self-discipline (see above, footnote 14); the importance of gratitude to one's parents, teachers, and seniors, and, underlying this, the notion of a child's progression from a position firmly at the centre of its mother's and its own small universe to a social being

capable of cooperation with others, and of distinguishing and shifting easily between behaviour appropriate to formal, "outside" contexts; and that appropriate to more informal situations.

This progression is marked by a number of ceremonies, both secular and religious. The first secular milestone for the majority takes place after reaching the age of three with entry to kindergarten, followed by entry to primary school, middle school, high school, and junior college or university. Entry to kindergarten and primary school also coincide approximately with two important religious ceremonies: that held when a child is three, and when they are seven as part of the *shichi-go-san* festival (literally seven, five, three). In this festival children are dressed in formal clothes, generally Japanese, but sometimes western, and taken to the shrine to thank the gods that they have survived until this age. These milestones also correspond to Japanese ideas on child development, which hold that by the age of three a child's basic character is formed, and he or she is ready to be separated from the mother and to learn to be a member of a social group, while during the period from birth to age seven the child is thought in some parts of Japan to still inhabit the divine sphere from which it came (Hendry 1986:16).[26]

As noted above in Chapter Five, section 5.1, the notion of adulthood in Japan is complex, and a number of different terms are used to refer to different aspects of it. The attainment of legal majority, or becoming a *seijin*, takes place in the January following one's twentieth birthday, when girls, in particular, dress up in kimono and again visit the shrine. However, the transition to *shakaijin*, or member of society, that takes place on entering

[26]Hendry cites two proverbs which encapsulate these notions of child development: "the soul of the three year old lasts till 100" and "until seven, amongst the gods" (Hendry 1986:38).

employment is more strongly emphasised. In contrast to the English language classification of the young into children and adults, with teenagers forming an ambivalent category in between, in Japanese the contrast that is stressed is that between *gakusei* (student) and *shakaijin* (member of society), regardless of age. And in this sense it is less helpful to locate the company entrance ceremony as one of a set of features seen as peculiar to Japanese companies and the Japanese employment system, than to see it as the culmination of a series of rites of passage that mark the progress towards fully adult status in Japan, with the company acting as agent effecting this important transition.

As has been elaborated above, the continuity between company entrance and earlier progressions along the path of socialization is made explicit in the language of the company entry ceremony, with its emphasis on the themes such as *gimu* (duty), and gratitude to parents, teachers, and seniors. And in this way the company constitutes itself as agent and guardian of one particular discourse of the relationship between individual and society in Japan, in a way that is equally relevant to male and female recruits. The company's authority in performing this role is not dependent on a long-term commitment between company and employee, but rather on the fact that it is the first employer of these until-now *gakusei*, and their point of entry to the outside world.

It is noteworthy in this context that Japanese views of the process of maturation emphasise the importance of a period of separation from the sheltered life of the home, and that this is often applied to women as well as to men. Tobin cites a number of proverbs making this point, for example "If you love your child, send him to the wide world" and "To become a (mature) person one must eat a stranger's rice" (Tobin 1992a: 26). And in

Futajimaya one of the (female) section managers told me that her parents had initially sent her to Futajimaya in Tokyo from her home on a farm in the western island of Kyushu rather than to a branch in a nearby city in order to build her character, before (they hoped) returning home to marry.[27]

Here we are again brought back to the question of varying agendas for joining the company. Some areas that need to be addressed in this context are: the disjuncture between the company's view of adulthood and what it requires from its recruits as adults and company members; the aspirations of the recruits, and their views of adulthood; and finally the aspirations of the recruits' parents.

6.5 Alternative agendas of adulthood

As argued in Chapter Five, for many of the recruits becoming a *shakaijin* means the chance to grasp new freedoms - a room of their own away from home, a salary to spend as they wish, and, for high school graduates, the chance to indulge in previously forbidden pleasures such as drinking or smoking, and more opportunity than before to establish relationships with members of the opposite sex. This representation of adulthood is particularly marked in popular culture, where the young *shakaijin* in television dramas, for example, tend to be depicted as enjoying the benefits of an independent lifestyle and having money of their own to spend on living in their own apartments furnished in the latest fashion, dressing well, and having an active social life. Probably the most influential role models for the eighteen to twenty-five age-group are the teen idols who appear on television and are known as *tarento*.[28] *Tarento*

[27]This case will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven.
[28]From the English word talent.

are always very young (late teens or early twenties) and unmarried. Their careers are short-lived, the women at least generally retire on marriage, while the men fade into obscurity. But during their brief period of success they enjoy fame, money, a luxurious lifestyle, and the attentions of the opposite sex. Their lives are widely reported on by the popular press, and poured over by the late teen/young adult age-group throughout Japan. And it seems fair to guess that for many of the young Japanese this representation of adulthood seems both more attractive and more relevant than the representation generated by their parents/educators/employers.

It should be noted, however, that this popular representation of adulthood is always a representation of young adulthood, generally prior to marriage for either sex, and is also very urban in character. This is perhaps a new category in the Japanese categorisation of stages in the life-course - an interlude between graduation and founding a household of one's own or joining a new household. It is in some senses a prolongation of the rights, or freedoms of childhood, coupled with a new financial independence, and has been made possible by the relative prosperity of modern Japan which relieves young adults in most cases of pressing financial worries. But although it is an interlude, it is one that is being increasingly prolonged as the average age of marriage rises, and seems like an eternity to the new high school graduates. Also, for the female graduates, this interlude corresponds more or less exactly in terms of social expectations with the duration of their employment in the company they are joining. Therefore, for women, becoming a company member and *shakaijin* is far more closely bound up with popular representations of young adulthood, and the consumer-orientated expectations of the *shinjinrui* than it is with the notions embodied in the formal discourse of renouncing rights and acquiring obligations.

This notion of an interlude of young adulthood, though of particular relevance to women, is not entirely gender-specific, although it accords better with popular ideas of the life-course of women than with that of men. As explained above in Chapter Two, section 2.5, popular ideas of life-course in Japan hold that men, on graduating, join the company with which they will spend the rest of their working lives, while women join a company where they will work for a few years before leaving to get married or to have children. Although they are likely to rejoin the workforce when their children are old enough to attend kindergarten or primary school, this will most likely be on a part-time basis, and there is no expectation that they will return to the same company that employed them on graduation. Thus, although for women adult life before retirement age is broken up into three distinct sections, for men it forms a seamless whole, and it is more difficult to detect a distinct slot which a period of young adulthood can occupy.

However, there are a number of cases in which a Japanese man's lifecourse may not follow the popular model outlined above. One such case is where the eldest son of a household is involved. Such a man may choose to join a large company on graduation with the intention of working there for a few years before succeeding to headship of his household and taking over the family business. This is a socially approved path for the successor to gain valuable experience in a less indulgent atmosphere than that of his native household, but it may also provide a chance for such men to enjoy a period of relative freedom before taking over the responsibilities of household and business. It is impossible to say how widespread this pattern is, as Futajimaya would not make available to me any statistics on the turnover of male employees, but a number of male *seishain* said to me that

the major reason for leaving the company among male colleagues from the same intake was to carry on their family business.

There are also those who take the attitude that they will work in the company for a few years, see how it goes, and then, possibly, move on. Contrary to popular belief outside Japan it is possible, and not uncommon, for young men (especially those in their early twenties) to switch companies, and this trend was accentuated in the boom years preceding Japan's slide into recession in 1992. In the Futajimaya case, the company union survey of 1991[29] showed that 33.9% of male employees aged under twenty-five, and 37.3% of those aged between twenty-five and twenty-nine, wished either to change companies or to set up on their own.[30] For these employees, too, the company may be perceived more as an interlude than as a long term commitment.

Another noteworthy trend among male employees that I observed was to opt out of becoming a *seishain* on graduation and instead work as an *arubaito.* For these men, in the short term they could earn as much as an *arubaito* as they could have as a *seishain,* and they enjoyed the freedom of movement this status gave them. Some had other long-term aims, such as pursing a career in music, which their current employment helped them to finance. Others simply had no very clear idea of what they wanted to do,

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[29]See Chapter Three, footnote 10, for data on the company union survey.

[30]This is a strongly age-related phenomenon, and is not restricted to Futajimaya - comparative statistics from a Japanese electrical company, for example, show similar figures of men under thirty wishing to change companies. After thirty, the percentage of male employees wishing to change companies drops, probably because the scope for doing so is reduced at that age - though this may also coincide with the end of the period of young adulthood. But, interestingly, in the Futajimaya case data from earlier surveys show that the thirty to forty year olds in the 1991 survey had shown a similar pattern to those now in their twenties when they were surveyed at that age, and a similar phenomenon was noted by Clark (1979) for a still earlier generation. The desire among men in their twenties to change companies does not, therefore, appear to be an entirely new trend.

and did not seem very bothered by it. This phenomenon of the *"furii arubaito"* or *"furiita"* (free part-time workers), also referred to in Chapter Two, section 2.5, has been much commented on in the Japanese press, but I am not sure if it is entirely new. The deputy branch manager at the Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya told me that he worked in a similar way when he first graduated, and was eventually coerced into becoming a *seishain* when he got married - his in-laws would not allow him to marry their daughter until he acquired *seishain* status. It may be, then, that for some men as well as for women, marriage constitutes a watershed that marks the termination of the period of being a young adult.

Finally, it might also be noted that the idea of an interlude between leaving school and taking up long-term commitments is also sanctioned and even encouraged by many parents. For women, marriage directly on graduation is increasingly rare, and many parents see a period of work experience not only, or even primarily, as an opportunity to find a husband, but as a chance to mature and become better prepared for marriage. But also, for men, as suggested earlier, a period of outside experience is often seen as desirable for an elder son, particularly where he is the heir to a family business.

To summarise: the company entrance ceremony can be interpreted as a formal occasion where the transition emphasised is that from student to adult, and member of society, with relatively little emphasis on the more specific transition to employee of Futajimaya. In the particular discourse of adulthood that was used in the speeches made on this occasion, adulthood was defined as a process of acquisition of duties, with duty to the company as employer appearing to follow on from this premise automatically. Other attributes that were stressed as desirable were respect for and gratitude to

seniors, teachers and parents; and the importance of group cooperation. This discourse has logical continuities with the overall way in which socialization is framed in Japan, as well as with the view of company-employee relations expressed in the training course, and in many *Nihonjinron* type expositions of "Japanese management" as described in Chapter One.

However, it contrasts both with the way in which adulthood is widely portrayed in Japanese popular culture, particularly that construction of adulthood associated with the *shinjinrui*, and with the way in which the Futajimaya repackaged itself for its recruitment drive. There would therefore appear to be more than one possible discourse of adulthood available to the new recruits, and the evidence would tend to suggest that the recruits remain unpersuaded by the official company line, adhering rather to the *shinjinrui* view of adulthood as the acquisition of greater freedom, and salary as conferring the ability to consume rather than conferring obligations to one's employer.

6.6 Formalisation and coercion: theoretical implications of the Futajimaya case

One major theoretical issue raised by the Futajimaya company entrance ceremony is that of formalisation and coercion. In general terms, it may be said that the speeches (together with the songs and symbols) made on this occasion fall into the category of formal discourse, and have many of the same characteristics as those described by Bloch for formal discourse in general (1975). Firstly, the content of the speeches is restricted and predictable, as are the illustrations and analogies used. Secondly, the stress laid on such notions as hierarchy, gratitude and duty, and in the widest sense the process of becoming a *shakaijin*, tends to reduce the specificity of

the event (becoming an employee of a large chain store) and to assimilate it into a general pattern of rites marking the progressive integration of individual into society in Japan, as will be explored further below. Thirdly, the values expressed are uncontroversial in the Japanese context, and appear unchallengeable. To quote Bloch:

> The most important social effect of this merging of the specific into the eternal and fixed is that it moves the communication to a level where disagreement is ruled out since one cannot disagree with the right order.
>
> (Bloch 1975:16)

The audience are drawn into a "tunnel" of discourse (Bloch 1975:24), where one proposition appears to lead inevitably to the next, and there is no possibility of open dissent or challenge. In Bloch's view, formalised speech therefore tends to be coercive, and express an imbalance in power between the speech giver and the audience. Bloch also argues that the rigidity of formalised speech, the inevitable connections that it posits, rob language of creativity, logic, and ultimately propositional force. So for Bloch, meaning in this type of speech is not propositional, but illocutionary, or performative. Or, in other words, the meaning of formalised speech is not to be found in what it says, but in what it does.

To apply Bloch's approach to the Futajimaya case, we might therefore begin by asking, what is the illocutionary force of the ceremony for new company entrants? One aspect of it is perhaps obvious: it marks the transformation of the new recruits to *shakaijin*, adults and full members of society. In so far as this status is dependent on becoming an employee, the ceremony has a performative role in the same way as does a wedding ceremony: the induction ceremony creates the *shakaijin* in analogous fashion to the creation of a married couple by a wedding ceremony. Another aspect of the illocutionary force of the induction ceremony is that

it affirms the status of Futajimaya as a large, established company. Along with the training course described in Chapter Five, it forms part of a characteristic configuration of practices that help to mark off large enterprises from smaller, less prestigious firms.

This type of analysis is, to an extent, useful in understanding the Futajimaya case. For one thing, to view the enactment of the transition from *gakusei* to company employee and *shakaijin* as the core of the induction ceremony, and the content of the speeches as relatively meaningless in propositional terms seems to dovetail with the recruits' perceptions of the event. As seen above, this and other similar events were dismissed by the recruits as boring and just repeating highly predictable types of statements, the details of which were promptly forgotten. However, they also assumed that to have such a ceremony was a natural part of joining a large company.

On the other hand, there are pitfalls involved in dismissing the propositional content of the speeches made on this occasion entirely. For one thing, they expressed adherence to a system of values that, although perhaps seen by the recruits as unappealing or simply irrelevant, were important from the point of view of the company management. Also, there was some attempt, though this seemed unsuccessful from the point of view of the female recruits, to persuade the recruits of the validity of the management perspective. As Bloch notes, extreme formalisation with its accompanying rigidity and predictability tends to be incompatible with attempts to persuade. For this reason, he argues that although religious rituals may follow entirely prescribed patterns, in political speech-making there is a shift between informal and formal speech patterns, and the approach followed is thus one of a mixture of coercion and persuasion.

In the Futajimaya case, this mix of patterns and tactics can be clearly seen, with periodic shifts to a more informal style, and attempts to project a modern, youthful style, through the use of examples drawn from popular culture (*manga*) and the use of foreign loan words. In this, there were also continuities with the representation of the company described for the recruitment drive in Chapter Four. But the difference here was that these examples were marshalled in the service of a discourse where the emphasis is on service to the company rather than benefits received by the individual employee, or, as succinctly expressed by the managing director in his speech, on *gimu* (duties) rather than on *kenri* (rights).

Continuities were thus created between the formal and informal parts of the speeches, with the one feeding into, and seeking to persuade the recruits of the validity of the other. The propositional content of both aspects of the proceedings is worth examining, in part because of the continuities between them, but also because the formal discourse of duty, gratitude to seniors, and the debt that employees owe to the company as a consequence of accepting a salary, ties in with more general representations both of company-employee relations in Japan and of the process of attaining full maturity and membership of Japanese society. To dismiss this discourse as meaningless in propositional terms is to blind ourselves to an important discourse of adulthood, and of the relationship between society and individual in Japan.

Furthermore, if we view the representation of company-employee relations contained in these ceremonies as part of a particular type of discourse, and recognise that there are also alternative discourses of adulthood, as has been explored above, we must also recognise the

possibility of evaluating and rejecting the view of adulthood presented in the company entrance ceremony. If this cannot be done explicitly, owing to the constraints imposed by the formality of the occasion, then indirectly, through simply "switching off" and paying no attention to the content of the speeches made. There is, in fact, some evidence that this is exactly what many of the female recruits did: as shown by the fidgeting, doodling instead of taking notes, inability to remember what was said afterwards, and description of the speeches as "boring" and "just saying the usual things". This in turn suggests that Bloch may have overstated the ability of formalisation to coerce, by assuming an absence of alternatives to the formal discourse of the power holders, and by neglecting "passive resistance" of the type shown by the female recruits to Futajimaya.

This is not to say, however, that the formal versus informal dimension is unimportant. As has been discussed above, the distinction between formal and informal is stressed in Japan, and is further associated with qualities such as outside and inside, distant and intimate. Part of the process of socialization involves an ability to adjust behaviour as appropriate to these contrasted domains. Formality is associated with outward-directed representations, the surface or how things are supposed to be, often termed in Japanese "*tatemae*", as contrasted with *honne*, or one's "real" feelings. It is a paradox of the entrance ceremony that while formally welcoming the recruits into the company it still holds them at a distance through its very format, situated by virtue of its formality at the outside orientated, *tatemae* pole of social relations. Perhaps for this reason, this and other formal ceremonies were supplemented by a number of informal welcoming parties, at which the new recruits were treated as company insiders for the first time.

6.7. Informal rites of incorporation

The first and largest in scale of the informal rites of incorporation was the welcoming party held by the store for the new intake. This was held two weeks after they entered the store, and a little over a week after the formal entrance ceremony described above, in the family restaurant on the top floor of the store, on a Sunday evening, after the store closed at 7.30p.m. Although the party was announced a week in advance at the morning meetings held on each floor of the store, and all employees, whether part-timers or *seishain*, were invited, in the event the vast majority of those attending were *seishain*. As far as I could tell, all the male *seishain* attended, and all the young, unmarried female *seishain*. A few older female *seishain* also attended, as did some of the long-serving middle aged part-timers, and a few of the younger women part-timers. But the feeling of the gathering was overwhelmingly youthful, in marked contrast to everyday working life in the store, where middle-aged women predominate at the section level.

Those who attended turned up in dribs and drabs, the women taking the longest to appear as they had to put on make-up and change out of their uniforms into their own clothes, whereas the men went directly from work in their work suits. In contrast to the entrance ceremony, a great mix of dress styles was in evidence among the women, ranging from sexy low-cut mini dresses to jeans and a sweat shirt, although a few did opt for a smart conservative style with a suit or dress and blazer. The *shinnyūsei* were mostly dressed at the casual end of the spectrum, with jeans being a popular choice, while those of the older women who attended wore more formal outfits.

In the restaurant, seven tables had been laid out with food and drink, one table for each of the floors (except floors five and six, which were grouped together in terms of management, and therefore also in terms of seating) and one for the office staff, including the top management. The office table was in the place of honour, furthest from the door, facing the other tables, with microphones set up in front of it. As we each arrived, we were directed to our floor's table, and people began chatting and eating while waiting for everyone to arrive. When everyone had arrived we all drank to the new intake, who were then called to the microphones in front of the office table. Their respective floor managers then presented them in turn with the caricatures of themselves that had been drawn by other *seishain* in their section before their arrival, and had until then been hanging in the corridor outside the locker rooms. As each *shinnyūsei* came to receive the caricature of herself the manager said a few words to her along the lines of *ganbatte kudasai*, (please do your best), to which the *shinnyūsei* responded with a bow, and the audience with applause. All of this was very relaxed and good humoured, with a lot of laughter and background chatting punctuating the proceedings.

We then all continued to eat and drink for a little while (with some people beginning to get noticeably inebriated) before a round of games, including the top management dressing up in stocking masks, and a game of bingo with prizes. During this time, people began to circulate, moving around in order to chat with friends at other tables. For the women, generational divides became evident here, with the few older women gravitating to each other, although everyone made some attempt to talk to the *shinnyūsei*, who were on the whole quiet, listening and smiling a lot, but saying little. The managers (all, at that time, male) stayed with their own floor's table, keeping the conversation moving, and making sure no-one was left out.

The senior staff at the office table also moved round the other tables, sitting down for a few minutes at each table for a drink and a chat.

After an hour or so, the food had run out, the games were finished, and people started to disperse. At this point some (including all the part-timers) returned home, while others moved on to do some more drinking at a karaoke bar nearby. As there was quite a crowd of us, we more or less filled the bar. By this time at least half of those remaining were male staff, including all the senior managers and most of the young male employees. Most of the *shinnyūsei* also continued to this second round, and seemed to be holding up surprisingly well, considering that they were all being liberally plied with drinks (despite the fact that they were still technically underage). Several of the men and a few of the women then sang, and the drinking and talking continued until about eleven, when the party finally dispersed, and the *shinnyūsei* returned to their dormitory for the night.

The store welcome party, the cherry blossom viewing party, and the floor welcome party all took place within a month of the *shinnyūsei's* entrance to the company. All these events seemed to be much enjoyed by those concerned, and all followed a pattern approximating that described above - eating, a good deal of drinking and joking, and generally a final stage in one of the neighbourhood karaoke bars. The male staff were much in evidence, and a certain amount of mild flirting/teasing of the *shinnyūsei* took place by some of the older male managers. These occasions were also used to tease some of the older unmarried female staff, by, for example, suggesting possible partners for them, to general hilarity. It is in the nature of this kind of gathering that it was impossible for me to follow all the various conversations, but I rarely heard work mentioned directly, and

it seemed rather that this type of occasion was a chance for everyone to get to know each other on an informal level.

It also seemed to me that there was a rather deliberate attempt on the part of the older male staff to step down a level, and invite a degree of ridicule of themselves by the younger staff that would certainly not have been tolerated in the workplace, for example by the senior staff dressing up in stocking masks at the party described above. The manager of the first floor, where I worked, achieved much the same end by drinking prodigious amounts while announcing to everyone within earshot that he was an alcoholic. All this with a wide grin, and not a hint of self pity. He was also frequently subject to teasing at these gatherings for his awful illegible writing, this being usually with reference to me, as he wrote up the points for our morning meetings. A typical comment would be: "Poor Matsunaga-san, having to cope with the manager's awful writing. Even we Japanese can't read it, how does she manage?" This would in turn elicit from the manager a comment about how little he had studied, despite having attended one of Japan's most prestigious universities. And so on. All the teasing seemed to be made, and taken with great good humour, but never spilled over to the workplace, where our manager's illegible writing continued, as did its straight-faced reception by the assembled staff every morning.

Broadly speaking, these events follow the pattern described by Moeran (1989) for drinking sessions in the pottery village where he conducted his fieldwork. This is true both for form - from formal opening to static exchange of cups, followed by mobile exchange of cups (people circulating), what Moeran terms "song drinking" (the karaoke session),

and finally separation - and for the social conventions governing the event. Moeran writes of the latter:

> It is only while drinking that a junior may forcefully criticise a senior to his (or possibly her) face, and only while drinking that a senior will accept such open criticism. Drinking is seen to break down all social barriers. It provides a "frame" for egalitarian relations which nicely counterbalances the hierarchy of everyday life.
>
> (Moeran 1989:18)

The welcome parties at Futajimaya would seem to provide an egalitarian frame in two senses: firstly in the deliberate efforts of seniors to play down the hierarchical relations between themselves and the ordinary *seishain*; and secondly in the membership of the gathering, as these gatherings were always numerically dominated by the young, unmarried generation of *seishain*, to whom they represented a welcome opportunity to mix with others of the same age-group in an informal way.

The message conveyed by this "egalitarian frame" is twofold. Firstly, it links in with the alternative discourse of adulthood for young adults: adulthood as freedom to stay out late, drink, and enjoy the company of others of the same generation, rather than adulthood as being increasingly caught up in a system of hierarchical, vertically organised relations characterised by the predominance of duties over rights. Secondly, as Moeran (1989:36) has argued, the shift from formal discourse (as in the company entrance ceremony) to informal discourse (as in the welcome party) can be interpreted as correspond ing to a shift from *tatemae* to *honne*, out-group to in-group discourse . Thus although it is the company entrance ceremony that officially marks their transition from outsiders to insiders, during the ceremony itself they are still being addressed as quasi-outsiders, presented with the formal view of how company relations are supposed to be. It is in the informal parties that follow that the *shinnyūsei's* insider

status is symbolically affirmed, and it is these that, one year on, the ex-*shinnyūsei* remembered with the greatest warmth.

Chapter Seven

Constructions of gender and life-course in Japan: Femininity

7.1. Introduction

In this section of the thesis the focus moves from the company-centered approach adopted in the preceding chapters to an employee-centred approach. That is, rather than asking what roles the various categories of employee play in the company, here the role that the company plays in the lives of its employees will be examined. In order to do this, it will be necessary to step outside the domain of the company and to consider notions about life-course in Japan, particularly as constrained by cultural constructions of gender.[1]

Rather than considering the transformation of the individual from *gakusei* (student) to *shakaijin* (social being), the focus here is on a slightly different notion of adulthood in Japan, that of becoming a complete person, or *ichininmae*. While the status of *shakaijin* is conferred automatically on leaving full-time education, as described in Chapter Six, and carries prescriptions with it of appropriate behaviour to be observed by the individual attaining this status, the status of *ichininmae* is far more nebulous, and indicates the achievement of a certain level of maturity and personal development. Becoming *ichininmae* is a process constrained by gender, in which both work and position in the household play a role, as explored in more detail below.

1The device of exploring Japanese social norms through an examination of individual narratives of maturation has been effectively used by Plath (1980).

One advantage of an approach based on life course is that it enables us to give due weight to the experience of the company's female employees. Many commentators on Japanese companies avoid detailed consideration of female employees in general and part-time employees (who are mostly female) in particular on the grounds that such employees are peripheral to the company. This stance is in turn justified by pointing to the role of women within most companies - a pool of semi-skilled cheap labour with no long term commitment to their employers.[2]

Viewed from a life-course perspective, however, the relationship between company and female employee appears somewhat differently. Given the high rate of female participation in the workforce, it would seem that employment outside the home, in many cases a large company, plays a significant role in the life-course of a high percentage of Japanese women. In 1989, the female labour force participation rate taken as an average for all ages was 48.6 per cent in Japan, higher than that of any Western European country. And between the ages of twenty and sixty, the majority of women of all age-groups in Japan were in paid employment.

Where labour force participation patterns are distinctive for Japanese women as compared to their European and American counterparts is in the sharp fall in participation rates between the ages of twenty-five and

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[2]Rohlen, for example, justifies his focus on the male employees of the bank where he conducted fieldwork in the following terms:

> About one third of all Uedagin members are women, and officially their membership provides them with the same relationship to the bank as their male counterparts. In actuality, however, they have neither as deep nor as lasting a relationship with the bank. Women must leave upon marriage. They are never found in positions of responsibility, and it is assumed that their involvement cannot become as strong as in the case of men....Their case highlights the fact that the standard for Uedagin conceptualization is the relationship of men to the bank.
>
> (Rohlen 1974: 20)

thirty-four, women's main childbearing years, followed by a gradual rise again from the ages of thirty-five to fifty.[3] This indicates a normative pattern for a large proportion of Japanese women to join the labour force on graduation from high school or university (nearly three quarters of the female population aged between twenty and twenty-four were in employment in 1989), leave on marriage or on the birth of the first child, and rejoin when their youngest child is old enough to enter kindergarten or primary school. A detailed breakdown of comparative figures for female labour force participation in Japan and in other major industrialised countries is given in table 7.1 below.

Most women who rejoin the labour force after having children are given the status of *pāto* - a particular category of "part-time" employee that is described in detail in Chapter Two. This employment status is, indeed, so heavily dominated by married women returning to the workforce that the term *pāto* in Japanese evokes the image of a middle-aged married woman.[4] As pointed out in Chapter Two, this adoption of part-time status involves the acceptance of much lower rates of pay than those enjoyed by full company members, even though there may only be a small reduction in working hours.

[3]A similar pattern can be seen in South Korea (Ehara and Inoue 1991:91)

[4]1984 figures show that over 75% of part-time female workers were over thirty-five, with an average age of 41.7, and 85.9% were married (Rōdōshō 1984:54; cited in Kondo 1990:276)

Table 7.1 Female Labour Force Participation Rate 1987

Age	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Italy	Canada	Austr.
15-19	16.6	42.8	56.5	40.1	11.8	24.9	54.3	53.7
20-24	73.6	72.3	69.2	74.4	64.2	62.6	76.3	75.5
25-29	56.9	72.8		67.2	75.7	61.8		
30-34	50.5	71.1	62.6	62.2	72.2	59.6	73.7	61.9
35-39	61.3	73.8		62.1	71.9	56.2		
40-44	68.4	74.3	71.4	62.4	72.0	49.1	73.7	65.8
45-49	68.4	70.6		57.7	67.8	42.8		
50-54	61.8	63.2	69.9	51.5	59.8	34.2	63.9	55.3
55-59	50.8	51.8	51.5	38.9	44.6	21.0		30.5
60-64	38.5	32.9	18.8	11.4	18.0	9.9	34.9	13.2
65-69	26.5	14.1		3.7	4.4	4.2	6.9	5.2
70-74		6.6	2.7	2.2	1.5			
75-	10.1	2.1		1.1	0.8	1.4	1.9	1.4
Total	48.6	54.2	48.2	42.0	45.8	35.0	56.2	48.3

Source: Japanese Working Life Profile 1990:67

Notes: Figures for UK and West Germany are for 1986
For teenage age group, figures for US are for 16-19 years,
figures for Italy are for 14-19 years

Commonly, life-course for a Japanese woman in a middle to lower income household residing in an urban area can therefore be divided into several distinct phases: dependence on parents - childhood and adolescence up to leaving full-time education; full-time employment and financial independence; marriage and care of pre-school children, dependence on husband; part-time employment combined with childrearing and

household responsibilities; retirement and the achievement of a degree of leisure. In this context, what significance attaches to the intervals in a woman's life when she is employed outside the home? And how do these intervals articulate with wider concepts of femininity and work in Japan? Given that both men and women participate actively in the labour force in Japan, what are the differences between the ways in which male and female work are viewed, and how do these in turn vary depending on generation and marital status?

This chapter will consider constructions of femininity in Japan, and the extent to which these constructions are applicable to the Futajimaya case. More specifically, the aim is to show how individual employees are affected by notions of gendered life course in their relationships with the company, and in the ways in which the older employees articulate the demands of company and household, through a selection of brief life histories.

7. 2. Constructions of Femininity in Japan

Robert Smith (1987) argues that in Japan men and women are seen as inhabiting socially distinct spheres. The female sphere is seen as primarily domestic, and revolves around the twin roles of household manager and mother. This construction of femininity is traced back by Smith to the Meiji era when "The proper role for the adult woman came to be defined as the dual one of good wife and wise mother". Smith locates the origins of the slogan "good wife and wise mother " (*ryōsai kenbo*) not in Confucian traditions of female subordination, but in Victorian ideals of feminine domesticity borrowed from Europe in the 1880s and 1890s (R. Smith 1987:7).

As both Sievers(1983) and Kondo(1990) have pointed out, this ideal of women's role in society was not entirely a restrictive move. Indeed in the context of the time, it in some ways represented an upgrading of women's status, insofar as this was a reversal of the Tokugawa view that women were incompetent in weighty matters such as the proper upbringing of children, a responsibility that more properly belonged to the adult males of the household (Kondo 1990:267). The slogan of good wife, wise mother was therefore also seized upon by various early women's movements, in whose hands it became part of an attempt to improve the status of women (Sievers 1983:110).

In Smith's account (1987), no conflict occurs between the promotion of a domestic role for women by the Meiji oligarchs and the demands for female labour in Meiji Japan, notably in the textile industry. This is because Smith sees the paid employment stage of women's lifecourse as occurring in the period of young adulthood, the interval between completing education and marriage. In the early days of industrialisation, it was a patriotic gesture for samurai families to send their daughters to work for a time in the textile industry, though this role was later taken over by young women from poor rural families. Thereafter, and until the 1920s, women from poor families dominated the female workforce. But by the late 1920s financial necessity impelled daughters of middle class urban families, too, to seek paid employment.[5]

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[5]In 1931 one commentator wrote of the effect of the recession on the middle classes:

> It is a situation in which women, who, until now, moved on after girls' schools to flower arranging and sewing and who did not know the taste of poverty, are suddenly facing the storms of life.
> (Kawasaki Natsu, *Shokugyō fujin o kokorozasu hito no tame ni* [Genninsha , 1931] 21; cited in Nagy 1991:205)

Financial necessity was, however, only part of the story. Also around this time non-factory work began to become available to women, and this work, largely white collar office work, but also as shop assistants in the developing department stores, and some professional jobs such as that of teacher, was seen as suitable for young women of good family. To help attract such women to these jobs, the companies themselves stressed the temporary nature of the work they were offering, and suggested that this period of outside work could form part of a woman's preparation for marriage. They sometimes even offered classes in skills considered suitable for marriage preparation, such as tea ceremony or flower arranging (Nagy 1991).

For unmarried women in the workforce as much as for their married counterparts, then, work was early subordinated to the feminine roles of wife and mother. For women of all classes, the ideal representation was of a docile employee helping towards her family expenses and diligently preparing for marriage. This representation has persisted, and is endorsed by the management and training policies of large companies in Japan today, where preparation for marriage is a recurrent theme as far as female employees are concerned.[6]

In Futajimaya, at least, young working women largely shared this view of their employment as temporary, with marriage and motherhood as their ultimate goals. The alternative of becoming a "career woman" (*kyaria*

[6]Rohlen writes of the training undergone by women entrants to the bank where he conducted his fieldwork:

> A special theme in the women's training is the interpretation of work as a preparation for becoming good wives and mothers....It is said, for example, that learning proper etiquette and polite language...will make them more cultivated, charming, and graceful, and therefore more attractive to their husbands and better examples for their children. Learning how to keep records and handle money will aid them in their responsibilities as keepers of the family purse strings.
>
> (Rohlen 1974:198)

uman) was not regarded as attractive, rather, this was seen as a choice incompatible with marriage, and those who took this path were viewed on the whole as pitiable - failures in the quest for a husband.[7] Here it is important to emphasise that marriage and child-bearing are seen as essential for the achievement of mature adulthood in Japan - the status of *ichininmae* - and women who do not marry or bear children tend to be seen as in some sense incomplete. [8] A striking example of this attitude, widely reported in the Japanese press in 1991, is the criticism of the former (female) leader of the Japan Socialist Party, Takako Doi, by a government minister, who cast doubt on her fitness to be a national leader on the grounds that she had never married or had children. In this regard, he contrasted her unfavourably with Margaret Thatcher, who, he suggested, was equipped to become Prime Minister not only because of the own talent as a politician, but also because she had fulfilled the feminine roles of wife and mother. Thatcher was a complete person, and therefore worthy of trust, in a way that Doi was not.

The point here is not that work and marriage are seen as incompatible - as noted above, a high percentage of married women are in employment in Japan, and certainly for those with family businesses, or households engaged in agriculture, it has long been standard practice for the wife of the household to participate actively in the household's economic activities. However, the dominant discourse of femininity in Japan as it has

[7]This sort of attitude is noted by Buruma in his examination of the portrayal of career women in television dramas:

> Okura Junko, heroine of 'The Dazzling Desert'...is single, pretty, in her thirties and a successful designer...But is Junko happy? No...she is miserable. Her life, as the title of the series implies, may be dazzling, but it is also a desert. At one point she laments that 'when a woman becomes like me, it's the end of everything.'
>
> (Buruma 1984:39)

[8]To some extent the same holds true for men, but in the male case there are alternative discourses of masculinity available that are notably absent for women - for example the notion of a "pure" masculinity untainted by female contact described by Buruma (1984) and discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

developed over the course of this century places the primary emphasis on the woman's role as wife and mother, with her outside economic activities firmly subordinated to her domestic responsibilities. Both Kondo (1990) and Nolte and Hastings (1991) have argued for a class dimension here, with the role of "professional housewife" being very much a middle-class aspiration. For women from less affluent families, returning to work after an interval of childbearing and child-rearing is the norm, and is not regarded as reprehensible, but rather as an index of her commitment to her household. Nonetheless, such outside work is almost always undertaken on a "part-time" basis, notionally to give the woman thus employed enough time for her domestic responsibilities. These, it should be noted, remain hers alone - there is no notion of husband's being asked to participate in domestic tasks even when the wife is engaged in outside employment. But there is also a symbolic dimension here: as already noted, "part-timers" often work long hours in Japan, but they are not seen as full company members. There is thus a division within the company between the full company members who owe their primary allegiance to the company, and the "part-timers" whose central focus lies elsewhere.

However, at the same time that the notion of femininity as defined by the roles of good wife and wise mother has taken hold in Japan, the gap between completing full-time education and getting married has become established as a distinct stage in the female life course, and one not wholly circumscribed by the notion of preparing for marriage. The existence of a period of young adulthood between the completion of formal education and marriage in Japanese women's lives can be traced back at least to the early twentieth century, as the average age of marriage for women rose fairly rapidly from around sixteen in the Meiji era to about twenty-three in the early twentieth century (Hendry 1981:25). It has continued to edge up since

then, reaching 25.3 in 1983 (Economic Planning Agency 1983, quoted in Foreign Press Centre Japanese Women Yesterday and Today 1986: 7). At the same time, however, the age on leaving formal education has also risen, so that the interval between education and marriage was actually at its highest point in 1930, at nearly ten years, shrinking to a little less than seven years in 1962, and just over six years in 1982 (The Japan Institute of Labour 1990: 12).

In addition to pursuing paid employment during this interval, many women moved away from their parental home, often to live in company dormitories. The development of this relatively independent stage in the female life course has been accompanied by the appearance of a popular representation of femininity in which the young independent working woman forms a distinct category, alongside more familiar representations of women as daughters, wives, housewives, and mothers.

The earliest of these popular representations of young working women seems to have arisen in the 1920s, when the term *modan gaaru* (modern girl) or *moga*, for short, gained wide currency. The modern girl was portrayed in newspapers and magazines as dressed in Western clothes, with short hair and long legs, given to promiscuity and cruising in the fashionable Tokyo downtown area, the Ginza. But the most striking aspect of this media image of the modern girl was her independence, specifically from ties of household or family. However, this independence did not, in most versions of the Modern Girl, extend beyond claiming control of her own life and leisure in a way that repelled many feminists of the time because of its emphasis on playfulness (Silverberg 1991). And although the modern girl was widely perceived as a threat to the established order,

this was more because of her independent behaviour in the public domain than because such women represented any organised force for change.

Furthermore, although the modern girl was represented as antithetical to the "good wife and wise mother" ideal of femininity, there is no evidence that the real women on whom this representation was based in fact chose never to marry, and still less that they sought to establish working careers along the lines of male careers. In the popular image of the modern girl she is forever young, her passage into middle age is not recorded, and it is her appearance and her social life, rather than her working life, that are the focus of interest.

The modern girl as a popular construct declined and then disappeared in the 1930s, with the rise of Japanese nationalism and a renewed movement to emphasise women's roles as wives and mothers, and to remove visible signs of Westernisation, as epitomised by the dress and comportment of the modern girl of the 1920s. By the early 1940s, the state had adopted a policy of encouraging population growth by reducing the average age of marriage and increasing the number of children per family.[9] In so far as these policies were successful, they had the effect of drastically limiting the independent phase of the female life cycle.

In the post war era, the image of an independent young working woman has been revived, and forms part of the representation of young adulthood embodied in the notion of the *shinjinrui*, discussed above in Chapters Four and Five. However, as with the Modern Girl of the 1920s, the focus of attention in these popular representations of young womanhood is not the

[9]Various methods were employed to this end, such as financial incentives to have large families, and the banning of contraception and abortion (Miyake 1991:278-9)

work element in women's lives, but their patterns of consumption and leisure,[10] and their independence as manifested in their ability to support themselves financially, and their residence in rented apartments or company dormitories, separate from their families.

Many examples of such women are found in popular culture. For example, the favourite television programme and a principal topic of conversation among the young women employees in Futajimaya in the spring of 1994 was "*kono yo no hate*", or "the end of this world", a drama serial featuring two of Japan's most popular young actors. The female lead played a young woman employee at a post office, whose boyfriend was a *furii arubaito*, without stable employment or even his own appartment. For some time he lived with her in the small appartment that she rented, but was also having an affair with another woman. At the time that I left Japan, the series took a dramatic turn with the boyfriend leaving her just as she (unbeknownst to him) had become pregnant. However, she did not follow the approved Japanese norm in these circumstances and have an abortion, but decided instead to keep and rear the baby independently, still without informing its father. In this, and other similar series, the world of work features quite peripherally in women's lives, and a great deal of attention is paid to their relationship with men. Marriage and children are still seen as desirable (if not always attainable). However, women are, importantly, depicted as capable of independence, taking responsibility and making their own decisions, sometimes more effectively than the male characters. Their employment does not exact from them a long term commitment, or involve them on a career level, but it does empower them as *shakaijin*, full

[10]The older members of this category of young single women, from around their mid twenties until marriage, are important targets for advertising because of their relatively high disposable income.

members of society, and provides them with the salary that makes their independence possible.[11]

In the discussion that follows of the women employees at Futajimaya, the way in which this relatively independent stage of the female life-course is constructed by the young women working at the store is explored further, as are the transformations in women's lives as they grow older and find their own solutions to the conundrum of balancing the demands of work, marriage and motherhood.

7.3. Women Employees at Futajimaya

The women in Futajimaya, both married and unmarried, come largely from lower income families. The unmarried women are mainly from rural families, while most of the married women are from the neighbourhood surrounding the branch at which they work. Although, in keeping with the general lack of class consciousness in Japan,[12] these women do not consider themselves as belonging to a lower or working class (the term working class is not used in Japanese in any case),[13] for most part-timers the main motivation for working is the need to supplement household income to meet daily living expenses.[14] Moreover, chain-store work is

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11There are important contrasts here with the situation experienced by young unskilled female employees in the UK, where low wages and the absence of subsidised accommodation for single people combine to make marriage and/or childbirth the path to achieving a home of one's own, and the independence associated with adulthood. For a more detailed discussion of this point see Westwood 1984.

12Government surveys repeatedly show that the vast majority of Japanese consider themselves "middle class".

13 There is no notion in Japan of a class defined by work. Most people refer to themselves as "*futsū*" - ordinary - and the class inflection is provided by references to people seen as different. In the Futajimaya case, the employees' self reference as *futsū* was opposed to *ojō-san* (young lady), thus placing the Futajimaya employees at the lower end of the social scale.

14In the 1991 Futajimaya company survey, 68.6% of the part-timers surveyed gave financial necessity as their main reason for seeking part-time employment outside the

badly paid, and low in prestige, so it tends to attract women with a relatively low level of education and no specific skills (such as word-processing, or a driver's license). As far as the Hatakeda branch was concerned, these women therefore stood in clear contrast to the more well-to-do local housewives, who, if they sought paid employment at all, would be likely to do something more prestigious, such as giving private lessons (for example in English or Japanese), or office work.

Most of the women at Futajimaya fitted fairly neatly with normative patterns of female employment and lifecourse. Although I was unable to obtain statistics on the percentage of married women in different employment categories, figures on the average ages of *seishain* and of part-timers show that the majority of older women employees fall into the latter category. Roughly two thirds of female *seishain* were under thirty at the time of the 1991 survey: their average age was 24.2; while for the part-timers surveyed the average age was 40.6, and 84.5 per cent were over 30. And from my observations at the Hatakeda branch, it seemed that few of the female *seishain* were married, and none, as far as I could ascertain, had children; whereas nearly all the female part-timers I knew were married with children.

Work, and the company was rarely the focus of these women's lives whether before or after marriage. For the young, unmarried female employees, their interests were more likely to be concerned with leisure, consumption, and relationships with men. Although marriage figured largely in their images of their future, for most of the eighteen-year-olds this still seemed a distant prospect, with an exciting interval of

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home. (This survey only covered the *teijishain*, a special sub-category of part-timer (see Chapter Three, section 3.4), but from my observations at the Hatakeda branch I would guess that this is a fairly close reflection of the general pattern for part-timers).

independence to be enjoyed beforehand. For many of these employees, Futajimaya was seen as a possible springboard to help them achieve other ambitions: perhaps enrollment on a course that their parents had declined to finance for them, or more glamourous work as a beautician or a hairdresser. For the older women, work at the store took second place to household responsibilities following marriage or, at the latest, childbirth, as symbolised by the shift in status from *seishain* to part-timer.

However, within this context, there was a great deal of individual variation in the ways in which women employees integrated work into their lifecourses. This is especially evident in the ways in which the older women coped with the twin expectations of a woman's role of housewife and mother on the one hand, and her role as member of the workforce helping to care for her family through her outside employment on the other. In the accounts that follow, some different approaches to this conundrum are shown. I have selected a range of brief life-histories, or vignettes for both older and younger women, in order to give an idea of the aspirations of the younger employees, and their perceptions of their relationship with the company; and, for the older women, to show some of the variety of pathways working women may follow. These accounts should not be considered as archetypes, though in the accompanying comments I shall consider how far each of these accounts may be considered more or less "typical" of women of a similar age group at Futajimaya.

7.4 The young *Seishain*: attitudes and aspirations

Kojima—san

Kojima—san was 19 years old when I met her. She had joined the Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya, quickly becoming a popular member of staff, particularly with the other young *seishain*, and often representing the branch in company wide sporting events - she was particularly good at volleyball. The youngest of four children, she was brought up in an island that falls under Tokyo's administrative jurisdiction, but is in fact over a twelve hour boat ride away. She said she joined Futajimaya because it had good fringe benefits—she particularly mentioned the fact that company dormitories have single rooms, whereas a lot of other chain store dormitories have several people to a room. She did not consider joining a department store because her school results were not good enough. As for why she chose the retail sector, she was quite vague—she thought it looked interesting and could not really think what else she might want to do.

She did not enjoy her work, when asked what she liked about the job she replied "nothing really", and she complained from time to time to me about how boring it was. Although animated and cheerful on company outings, she tended to be glum and monosyllabic at work,[15] where she was isolated as the only young *seishain* in a section otherwise comprising only part-time *oba-san* - middle aged women. Kojima-san often said she wished she could do more interesting things, but did not appear to have any specific ideas about what else she could do. When

[15] I had ample opportunity to observe this as we worked in the same section.

asked if she would like to become a section chief in the future, she laughed and said "Oh no, I'm not going to stay that long." As to how long she did plan to continue, she was also quite vague, just saying she did not want to stop immediately.

In fact, Kojima-san did stop, quite soon after I had completed my fieldwork, after only about two years with Futajimaya, and I suspect she may have been job-hunting for some time before that. She found a job as an insurance sales-woman based in the Hatakeda area, and moved out of the company dormitory into her own apartment. She still came to visit her old colleagues at the Hatakeda branch from time to time, and they said that she was enjoying her new job, and the higher salary it offered. There was no general condemnation of her move - her former colleagues simply said it was her business what she decided to do with her life. The *pāto* who continued to head the section where Kojima-san had worked did, however, complain that the remaining section members had been very overstretched following Kojima-san's departure, and that she had been obliged to start all over again training another new recruit to work in the section

Watanabe-san

Like Kojima-san, Watanabe-san was the youngest of four, in her case all girls. Although their home was in Kagoshima, in the island of Kyushu, only one sister had remained there. The two oldest had gone first to Tokyo, and then on to the United States, where they now lived. Watanabe-san had been inspired by their example to find a job in Tokyo, and this was her main reason for choosing Futajimaya, although she also mentioned the fact that her school *senpai* worked in a branch of

Futajimaya near the Hatakeda branch, and that she had been impressed by the Futajimaya pamphlet.

Twenty-seven years old at the time I conducted my fieldwork, Wakita-san had already clocked up eight years as a *seishain* at Futajimaya, and had recently been promoted to section chief. However, she said that she did not aspire to any further promotion, and laughed at the idea of being a "career woman", "*Futajimaya de kyaria uman wa chotto iya desu ne*" (Being a career woman at Futajimaya is sort of a yucky idea isn't it?). She said she felt rather stuck in a rut, and wanted to do something "by myself", although, like Kojima-san, she was quite vague as to what that something might be. She also said she found the human relations at Futajimaya "a bit difficult".

Watanabe-san was old enough to have experienced the former dormitories at Futajimaya, and recalled how awful they were - an old wooden building with three people to an eight *tatami*-mat room,[16] and infested with bugs. Like some other employees of the same generation, she was indignant about this, commenting that the company had lied about the dormitories in the recruitment material. She said she had moved to a privately rented apartment as soon as she could afford to do so - in her case, four years after joining. She did say, however, that there was a good side to the old dormitories in that they enabled one to establish close, friendly relations with *senpai*, a situation she contrasted with the current state of affairs, where she felt employees were more isolated from each other, just individuals (*kojin, kojin*).

[16]Rooms in Japan are commonly measured in tatami mats. One tatami mat = approximately 1.62m^2(1.8m x 0.9m)(Japan Institute for social and Economic Affairs 1990:87)

Watanabe-san appeared to have many friends, both within Futajimaya, and friends from her hometown who had also moved to Tokyo. As far as outside work interests were concerned, her greatest enthusiasm seemed to be directed towards travel: she aspired to going to the United States as had her sisters, and was interested in all things American, although she worried about her inability to speak English. However, on a return visit to the store two years later, this dream had not yet been fulfilled.

Kobayashi-san

I met Kobayashi-san on the training course described in Chapter Five. A somewhat withdrawn, nervous, young woman, she was the oldest of three children, with a younger sister in the first year of high school and a brother in elementary school. Her family lived in Nagaoka city, Niigata prefecture, a large provincial city in North-eastern Japan. She described her father as "just an ordinary salaryman".

She had decided to join Futajimaya because she wanted to work in retail, and it was the only large store advertising jobs at her high school that offered places in Tokyo. She said she wanted to go to Tokyo because she thought it would be boring to spend all her life in one place. Another attraction of Futajimaya was the single-room dormitories. She said she found the work better than she had thought it might be, having initially been very put off by her experience of the training course, when she had thought she might just give up and go home. She was, nonetheless, already thinking of leaving less than a year after entering the company, saying that the main thing that made her stay was that the (new) dormitories were so nice, and it would be hard to move out and find anywhere else as good.

Kobayashi-san invited me to lunch at the dormitory on one occasion, and it did indeed seem very comfortable. "Dormitory" in fact seemed a misnomer - it was to all appearances a modern block of self contained studio flats, in which Kobayashi-san had a pleasant, if small, apartment. In the single room that served as living and sleeping space, she had arranged her futon to act as a sofa in the daytime, and next to this was a small table, and beyond that a large television and video recorder. She also had a compact disc player for music.

Although Kobayashi-san's ambition is to marry and have children, she says she hates cooking and housework, so when I visited we feasted on a selection of pastries from the local French style patisserie. She told me that she never cooks for herself, and claims she would not know how and is happy to live on take-away food, much of it European style. Her main leisure interests were watching television and shopping with friends - all of whom are fellow employees living in the same dormitory, and we followed our lunch with a leisurely stroll around a department store located near the dormitory, admiring the fashions, and deciding what we would we buy if we could afford it.

Kobayashi-san was an enthusiastic fan of television dramas - we shared some favourites as we both liked murder mysteries, as well as a series that might be most succinctly described as a Japanese version of "The Twilight Zone". She was also a dedicated follower of the drama serial of young adult life in Japan, "The End of this World", described above, and in the realm of popular literature enjoyed the work of the unusually named Banana Yoshimoto, a woman writer who became popular in Japan while still in her early twenties. As with "The End of this World", Yoshimoto's writing

concerns the world of young adults, and is more concerned with the relationships they form with each other than with the domain of work.[17]

The Young Seishain : an overview

The three young women so briefly sketched above were fairly typical of the young, unmarried women employees at Futajimaya, both in their reasons for joining(eminently practical, with the emphasis on the access that Futajimaya could provide to the coveted independent Tokyo lifestyle) and in their aspirations for their future. They did not in any sense envisage themselves as career women, and the one who had stayed for some years and gained promotion did not see this as a success, but rather felt that she had got "stuck in a rut". This sense of being stuck was not, however, because she had not yet married, but rather because she had not made the move to other things, doing "something by herself", perhaps along the lines of her sisters who had gone to the United States, or Kojima-san who found better pay and greater independence in door-to-door insurance sales.

Marriage remained an ultimate goal for all these women, the unquestioned final destination of the path of young adulthood. But this goal remained hazy and distant for many, with no connection apparently made between the daily toil of a housewife and their own inability and disinclination to cook or keep house. In the meantime, they enjoyed their new-found independence, working conscientiously, but reserving their enthusiasm for leisure pursuits, whether individual or company organised, and orientating themselves very much with the world of young urban adults and consumers. The extent to which marriage for women in Japan acts to transform their lives and to effectively end this period of independence

[17]Yoshimoto's work is also interesting in its explorations of notions of gender, with one of the main characters in one of her stories switching gender from male to female.

and leisure can be gauged by the accounts of mature women's lives given in the next section.

Despite their common elements, however, the vignettes above also highlight the changes that have taken place in Futajimaya in recent years. Watanabe-san experienced a rude introduction to group life in the crowded and dirty conditions of the dormitory of that time, conditions that she recalls with a mixture of indignation and nostalgia for the close human relations that it fostered. Here we find echoes of the familiar discourse of the subordination of self to group, and hardship as a way of instilling group identity.[18] This is contrasted by Watanabe-san with the more "individualistic" life-style of current recruits, a similar contrast to that drawn by Mrs Arakawa in the next section.

7.5. Mature women: working lives

Matsumoto—san

Of these narratives, Mrs Matsumoto is exceptional on two counts: firstly she is not an employee of the Hatakeda branch, but works in a branch in the Osaka area. I met her while participating in the company training course, where she was acting as trainer. Secondly, and more importantly, she is the only woman I met at Futajimaya who has been able to make the transition from part-timer to full company member status. This is very unusual, and was not considered to be a possibility by any of the other part-timers I interviewed.

Matsumoto san is in her forties, and has been with the company for ten years. On graduating from high school she joined a department store,

[18]A recent account of overcrowded dormitories, and their rationalisation in terms of the instilling of group norms can be found in Lo (1990).

Daimaru, near her home in Osaka, where she worked until she got married four years later. She then had a ten-year break, during which time she had three children. Also during this time two other important changes took place in her life, her mother became ill and came to live with her and her husband, and Mrs Matsumoto began to suffer from depression. She saw a doctor who advised her to get out of the house more, and when she said she found this difficult he suggested that she get a job outside the home.

She was able to find a job as a part-time sales assistant at the Osaka branch of Futajimaya, (she decided to work at a large store because of her previous work experience) working from 9.45 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.. These were unusual hours - generally *pāto* at Futajimaya work until 4.45 p.m., but she wanted to be home when her children returned from school, and also she did not want her husband to find out she had taken a job. It was not uncommon for Japanese men of Mrs Matsumoto's generation in middle-income households to forbid their wives to work, and a number of wives, like Mrs Matsumoto, resorted to working in secret. She managed to juggle work responsibilities and housework and childcare for some years, with the help of her mother, who by that time was sufficiently recovered to take on the lion's share of the housework.

Gradually, she became more involved with the company, taking on more responsibility and staying later in the evening. Then her section chief left, and, as she had pretty much taken on a section chief's responsibilities by then anyway, the store asked her to become a full company member and section chief. Mrs Matsumoto found it hard to say no directly to this offer - company requests in Japan are generally interpreted as orders, with the only option other than acceptance being to leave the company. She therefore replied in evasive terms, hoping that they would give up the

idea, as she could not possibly accept the job without telling her husband, who still did not know she was working. (Section chiefs work weekends, when most husbands are home). However, the store did not give up, and she eventually found she was boxed into a corner, and had to talk to her husband about it. To her surprise, he was very supportive, so she took the job, and has subsequently added the task of training new recruits to her other responsibilities.

Mrs Matsumoto's life is very busy. She finishes work at about 8.00 p.m. every day, and returns home by 8.30 p.m. She then starts preparing dinner, which is ready by 10.00 p.m. Her sons help her with the cooking—her eldest son is now nineteen. Her mother can no longer help as much as she used to—she is seventy-six and tires easily. However, Mrs Matsumoto is content with being a section chief, and is satisfied with her work at Futajimaya, particularly because it has enabled her to make friends, though she also enjoys the work itself. She does not aspire to becoming a floor manager, as that would involve accepting transfers, and she does not want to be moved away from her family.

Arakawa-san

A cheerful, energetic woman, Mrs Arakawa was a full company member and section chief on the floor where I was employed at the Hatakeda branch, and also worked as a trainer on the on-the-job training programmes for both *seishain* and part-timers. She was born in Saga, a rural district on the island of Kyushu in western Japan. The second of two children in a farming household, her parents initially wanted her to succeed to the family farm, as her elder brother, who should have

succeeded according to the custom of eldest-son inheritance,[19] had successfully completed University and entered a company. However, Mrs Arakawa was adamant that she did not want to be a farmer, and so the older brother was obliged to give up his job and return to the farm in Saga.

Having failed to persuade their daughter to take on the family farm, her parents then tried to convince her to carry on with her education, as her brother had. However, Mrs Arakawa disliked studying, and wanted to go to work in an urban area, preferably in Fukuoka, the main city on the island of Kyushu. Her parents eventually agreed to let her go to work on graduating from high school, but argued that Fukuoka was too close, only a day's journey from their farm, and that as long as she was leaving home, it would be better to go further away. Mrs Arakawa explained that they took this line because in Japan it is thought good for the development of character that children should live independently from their parents for a time - ideally about three years. Her parents thought that she would be less likely to give up and return home if she went to work far away - home would not then be within such easy reach. Since it had taken quite a long time to reach a family consensus about what she should do, by the time Mrs Arakawa came to apply for a job there were few places left open, and she had little choice as to which job to take.[20] She therefore applied to Futajimaya by default, not because she had any positive reason for choosing to work there.

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[19]Eldest son succession to the headship of the household, or *ie*, was enshrined in Japanese law during the Meiji era, though before that time it seems that there was considerable regional variation in inheritance and succession patterns. Post-war occupation reforms established the equal rights of all children to inherit household assets, but in practice, in rural areas at least, all children save one tend to renounce these rights, with eldest son succession being the ideal.

[20]See Chapter Four for a detailed explanation of the rigidities of the Japanese recruitment system.

She joined Futajimaya in 1977, and by the time I conducted my fieldwork had been there for fourteen years. She met her husband at Hatakeda branch, which he joined two years after she did. They married five years later, in the same year that Mrs Arakawa was promoted to section chief. She achieved her promotion after her husband, a full two years after passing the necessary exam. This was because at the time the position of section chief was introduced the men eligible for the post were all promoted before the women, as a matter of policy. Her husband was subsequently promoted again, and in 1991 worked at head office in downtown Tokyo.

Mrs Arakawa, however, denied any ambition to be promoted further herself. She explained that her only reason for continuing to work was that in seven years of marriage she and her husband had been unable to have children, and as long as she had no children she felt that she would be bored staying at home. She was not interested in studying (many reasonably well-off Japanese housewives fill their time by studying or taking up a hobby - anything from English lessons to flower arrangement) and since all her life since graduation had been bound up with Futajimaya, she did not know what else to do.

Her husband had no objection to her continuing to work as long as they had no children, but he did expect her to do all the housework, laundry, cooking and shopping for their home. She laughed as she told me that he just sits down when he gets home and issues orders "beer", "food", and so on - behaviour that is depicted in Japan as "typical" of husbands, and part of Japanese images of masculinity. As is common in Japan, he never tells her when he will be working late or going out to dinner, so there are occasions when she cooks a meal and he does not turn up to eat it. I asked her if this annoyed her, and she laughed again and said, "Of course, but I

don't say a word. When he comes in I just pick up all the plates and scrape the food off into the rubbish, right in front of him."

For married couples such as the Arakawas, Futajimaya makes an effort to keep husband and wife in the same area of Japan, so if Mrs Arakawa's husband (who, like most men, is employed on a national contract) were transferred to a different area she could in theory also be transferred, though she might have to wait a little while for a position at section chief level to become available. Given this situation, I asked her why she chose to remain on a "home" contract and not shift to a national one which would make her eligible for promotion. [21] She again reiterated that she had no interest in promotion, and said that she did not want to risk being transferred to another branch, even within the same area, as she would not then be able to cycle to work, as she could at present. She said that her main ambitions for the future, as far as work was concerned, were that the people she was training would do well.

Reminiscing about her early experience at Futajimaya, Mrs Arakawa recalled with nostalgia the conditions in the company dormitory when she first joined. She concurred with Watanabe-san's account that it was dirty and crowded, with three people to a room, but said that she was happy there. She said that the *senpai* were friendly, and seemed more like older sisters, and also commented that the recruits in those days had a *gaman* (endurance) mentality. In her view, that changed from around the early eighties, and since that time the *gaman* mentality has largely been lost, with the influx of a new generation brought up in a richer era than that of

[21] The home and national systems are explained in detail in Chapter Three, section 3.4.

Mrs Arakawa and her contemporaries. Of the new recruits she said, "They will do what you tell them *kichinto* (punctiliously), but nothing more."

A postscript to Mrs Arakawa's narrative was added in the spring of 1994, when she resigned from Futajimaya. Although she had not had a child, and still wished to continue working, she and her husband had bought a house in a distant suburb, and she could not commute and continue to do all the domestic work of their household. The choice of location of their house was in part determined by the high price of property in Tokyo, which meant that they had to move far out of the centre to find anything they could afford. However, Mrs Arakawa reportedly favoured this location anyway because it was popular with former Futajimaya staff, and her long-time friend and fellow section chief, Miss Nishiguchi, who had resigned earlier in the year in order to marry, had also bought a house in the same area.

Mrs Arakawa told me she planned to get a new job as a *pato* in a different company, probably another store, close to her home, as she would get bored if she gave up work altogether. Asked if she had any regrets on leaving Futajimaya, Mrs Arakawa 's eyes wandered around the store, where we were talking, "Well... everyone's so young now, you see. Did you know the average age of women *seishain* has dropped to twenty-one?"

At thirty-four, Mrs Arakawa found herself isolated. All her female contemporaries had already resigned, and she was increasingly an anomaly: a middle-aged woman in Japanese terms, but still a *seishain* and childless. She must also have been expensive for the company to continue to employ, given her accumulated seniority,[22] and a young male *seishain*

[22]The financial implications for large Japanese companies of retaining women employees long term, when they are limited to low-ranking, relatively unskilled positions, but nonetheless receive pay based on their length of service, have been explored by Roberts (1994). She argues persuasively that the company she studied did

had long been waiting in the wings in her section, explicitly groomed for the position of section chief. This would have been an important consideration for the company as it struggled with a situation of economic decline, and for her the resignation bonus on offer after sixteen years of service would have been a considerable help in financing their new home. Whether or not she was actually encouraged to leave I was not able to discover, but it seems likely that a number of factors combined to make Mrs Arakawa eventually give up her position at Futajimaya.

Ushijima-san

There was one exceptional woman *seishain* that I met at Hatakeda, however, who resisted all the pressures that tend to bar women from advancement within Futajimaya. Ushijima-san was one of only three women in Futajimaya to reach the rank of floor manager. She joined the Hatakeda branch only about a month before I completed my fieldwork, but she had worked there some years previously, and seemed well liked by those who had worked with her. At forty-three unmarried and likely to remain so, and one of the most successful women in the company, of the women I knew Miss Ushijima approximated most closely to the popular image of the "career woman".

Miss Ushijima was born in a small town in Yamanashi prefecture, the younger of two sisters and daughter of a "salaryman" or company employee. Miss Ushijima went to a commercial high school, originally intending to seek office work rather than a position in sales, but in the event her choice was constrained by the fact that she wished to leave

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not want women employees to remain long term because of the high costs involved, and the perceived irrationality of paying high wages for low skilled work. However, as *seishain*, their job security was guaranteed, and because of their gender it was not thought appropriate to resolve the situation by allowing them to rise to more senior ranks. The solution the company opted for was therefore to bring indirect pressures to bear on the older women employees to resign.

home, and therefore had to look for a company with a dormitory. She took, and passed, a number of company entrance examinations, including that for Takashimaya, one of Japan's most prestigious department stores, but she chose Futajimaya because they had space available in their dormitory and Takashimaya did not. This was in 1966, just before Futajimaya's major period of expansion, and Miss Ushijima remembers it as being a good time to join from a career point of view, although perhaps not so good from an individual point of view as employees were very much subject to transfer(she noted that this was less so for female employees). Miss Ushijima herself has been transferred four times, though always within the same area of western Tokyo, and is now classified as a zone employee, that is, one subject to transfer within a limited zone, though she noted that this system of dividing employees up into home, zone and national employees has only been in existence since about 1987 or so.

Miss Ushijima's first promotion came in 1970, when she attained the rank of section chief, and in 1985 she became the first woman floor manager in the Futajimaya group. Commenting on the dearth of women in senior positions in the company, she said that at the time she joined women's work was conceived of as *koshikake* - a stopgap between school and marriage. In the 1960s, most women *seishain* only stayed for three years, almost no-one had stayed as long as ten years, and few for five years. There were also few part-timers - almost all female employees were *seishain* in their late teens and early twenties. She said that Futajimaya was in no way unusual in this - a similar situation obtained in all Japanese companies at the time. Career advancement did not really seem to be a possibility for Miss Ushijima's generation, nor was it Miss Ushijima's original intention to make a career within the company. But when she reached the age of about twenty-eight with no marriage prospects on the horizon, she

realised that she was probably going to stay single, and, with hindsight, she thinks that this probably facilitated her rise to manager, as she had no conflicting demands on her time. "Being single, my time is my own."

Aside from her unmarried status, she attributes her promotion to her own liking for the work, and to the support of those around her, both superiors and subordinates. But she says it is not easy being a woman in a responsible position, as such women are still rare, and the general assumption, both of customers and within the company as a whole, is that only men hold such positions. For this reason, a customer with a problem will often insist on speaking to a male employee, even if he is a new recruit, in preference to speaking to Miss Ushijima. At the moment, there seems no possibility of further promotion, but, as Miss Ushijima herself says, it once seemed impossible for her to get as far as she has. "I'll take it as it comes."

Miss Ushijima had less to say than did other female employees about her life outside work, simply saying that she likes to play golf in her free time, which she does mainly with friends from outside the company. On the subject of work, however, she had a lot to say, and was full of enthusiasm about new schemes she hoped to introduce at the Hatakeda branch, such as a rotation scheme to familiarise employees with the work of sections other than their own. "I've only just got here, *kore kara charēnji suru* (from now on I shall 'challenge' [23])."

Miura -san

Mrs Miura was a *junshain* (a sub-category of part-timer)[24] who worked in the delivery section of the Hatakeda branch. Born in 1940 in the Tokyo

[23]An English loan word used with the meaning of "do one's best, take initiatives."
[24]The different categories of part-timer are explained in more detail in Chapter Three, section 3.4.

area, but evacuated to Yamanashi prefecture during the war, Mrs Miura returned to live in Tokyo at the age of eight. The younger of two sisters, she was trained from the age of twelve in flower arranging, and from the age of fourteen in the tea ceremony. Mrs Miura's aunt was a teacher of the tea ceremony who had no children of her own, and Mrs Miura was originally intended to succeed her, but gave up this idea when she married at the age of twenty-five. Mrs Miura's sister has now succeeded their aunt as teacher of her tea ceremony school. Mrs Miura's husband is an ordinary company employee, and they have one daughter.

Unlike most part-timers, Mrs Miura did not claim to work from financial necessity, but traced her involvement with Futajimaya back to her long-standing friendship with the general office manager at the Hatakeda branch,"the Chief", whose life story is given in Chapter Eight. He originally persuaded her to join Futajimaya when she was thirty, telling her, "It's not yet time to take it easy (*mada asobu jikan janai*), you should come and work with us." She duly joined a branch a few stations down the line from the Hatakeda branch, where the chief was currently office manager, and worked there until it closed down ten years later. She then took a six-year break during which she concentrated on being a housewife and mother, before again being persuaded by the chief, who was by that time office manager at the Hatakeda branch, to go and work there.

Again unusually for a part-time female employee, Mrs Miura does not live near the Hatakeda branch - it takes her about one hour by train to get to work. Her sole reason for choosing this inconvenient location was her friendship with the chief. She commented particularly that he lets her take responsibility for running the delivery section, a job that is usually entrusted to a man, and she can also act for him when he is absent. She has

a great admiration for the chief, and told me that he had all the qualifications for becoming a branch manager, but simply did not seem to want to. Like most part-timers, however, Mrs Miura denied that she enjoyed her work, saying, "I don't exactly *like* it, but I'm still physically strong, so it seems the natural thing to do. Anyway, having my own work cheers me up. Though I never thought I would do this kind of work - I was brought up to do tea and flower arranging. But the people are friendly here."

Regarding her life outside the company, Mrs Miura said that she had little free time since her father is ill. Saturday and Sunday are days off for her, and one day she rests while on the other she tries to study the English alphabet so that one day she can teach it to her grandchildren. She had once planned to use her Futajimaya wages to pay for her studies, but she finds that it goes mainly on clothes and treats for her family. The housework is left entirely to her - her husband thinks that it is women's work. Asked about her plans for the future, Mrs Miura said she hoped she could help her grandchildren to learn English, and also that she would like to take up the tea ceremony and flower arranging again as a hobby.

Noguchi-san

Mrs Noguchi was closer to the norm for Futajimaya's part-time employees than was Mrs Miura in a number of respects. Firstly, I got the impression that her reason for working was primarily financial necessity, although this is a delicate subject about which it was impossible to ask directly. Also, she chose Futajimaya because it was convenient - just fifteen minutes walk from her house. Secondly, she had no particular senior figure to whom she was attached - although she was originally introduced to the company by another friend who was working there part time and had heard that they needed more staff, this friend had long since ceased working for the store.

And finally, her complaints about the company, although more articulate than those of many part-timers, echoed the general grumbles I frequently heard from other part-timers I worked with.

In her late forties, both Mrs Noguchi and her husband were born in central Tokyo. They moved to the Hatakeda district twenty-seven years ago, as this was the home area of Mrs Noguchi's mother, and they were given some land by her mother on which to build a house. Given that land prices in Hatakeda have sky-rocketed since then, this makes Mrs Noguchi nominally fairly well off, but this wealth remains tied up in the Noguchis' property. As far as upbringing and current disposable income are concerned, Mrs Noguchi seemed to belong to the lower income segment of Japanese society - her father was a tailor, and she describes her husband as "just an ordinary company employee".

Mrs Noguchi herself started work immediately on graduation from high-school, and until she got married worked as a hairdresser. She gave up work on marriage, and re-joined the workforce as a Futajimaya part-time employee when the younger of her two children reached the age of ten. She plans to continue as long as her health is good, and says she likes the work - she feels it suits her, she gets on well with her workmates and feels the store has a friendly atmosphere. She makes a clear distinction, however, between those employees who are ordinary shop assistants, whether full or part-time, and the senior managerial staff, from floor manager upwards. She feels the latter have "no connection" with her (*kankei nai*), a sentiment echoed by most part-timers with whom I spoke.

Her main complaints about working at Futajimaya centered around the high turnover of staff, particularly female *seishain*, and the difference in

the treatment accorded *seishain* and part-timers. On staff turnover, she said she wished the management would be more careful in their recruitment of staff, and screen out those who are likely to stop soon. Otherwise the long serving part-timers end up teaching new staff the job from scratch again and again. She also complained that new *seishain* earn more than part-timers who, like herself, have many years experience. She thought that this was unfair, and happens because the part-timers are women, and management think that women only need to earn pocket money, as their husbands support them. Mrs Noguchi disagreed strongly with this way of thinking, saying that the husband's salary is irrelevant.

It was Mrs Noguchi who told me of the abortive attempt by part-timers to set up their own union within the company as a way of making their voices heard (see Chapter Nine, section 9.5). But she thought there was no chance of doing this, owing to management opposition, and the fear that most part-timers had of losing their jobs if they made an issue of it. She said that although most part-timers she knew would like to have a union, probably no-one would talk to me about it because of their fear of the consequences of being known to have pro-union sympathies. This, again, was in sharp contrast to the *seishain*, who have their own union fully approved of and supported by the company.

As was generally the case for the married women to whom I spoke, Mrs Noguchi took sole responsibility for the work of running her own household, doing the cleaning, laundry and cooking in the evening - she worked at Futajimaya from 9.45 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. five days a week - and on her days off. When she gets too tired she takes time off work, and sometimes goes on short trips with friends. She also takes one long (by Japanese standards) holiday a year, about five to seven days, in the

summer. She has made many friends at Futajimaya, all part-timers like herself, and she sometimes sees them in her free time. They get together usually just to chat or go shopping. But she also has friends from her neighbourhood and still sees old school friends too. Here, again, Mrs Noguchi was probably fairly typical of the part-time female workforce, who, unlike their *seishain* counterparts, have usually lived for a long time in the Tokyo area, and are part of an extensive social network, in which Futajimaya plays a role, but not necessarily the predominant one.

Narratives of Maturity: Employment and the Married Woman

Fragmentary though they are,[25] a number of common themes run through the above narratives. One is the notion of work as important to well-being, both physical and mental, and the idea that, once her responsibilities for rearing pre-school age children are discharged, a woman should work outside the home (as well as running the household) for as long as she is physically capable of so doing. There is a strong bias against perceived idleness here - even if finances permit. If a woman cannot find a socially approved outside activity to engage her in the time when she is not occupied with household tasks, it is thought proper and healthy for her to go out to work. Thus Mrs Arakawa explained that she wished to continue to work because she had no interest in studying (an approved alternative for

[25]The fragmentary character of these narratives derives in large part from the way in which they were recorded - in slack intervals during the working day, always subject to interruption from the demands of work, and, except in the case of the floor manager, who was interviewed in her office, with the lack of privacy inherent in the location of the interview - the sales area of the store, or in the busy staff canteen. These problems are an unavoidable aspect of collecting information on busy working women, who lack the status within the company that would enable them to simply cease work for the duration of an interview, and have little spare time to devote to a visiting researcher outside working hours. Nor is it easy to visit such women at home - invitations into one's home are not readily issued in Japan, partly because of cramped space, but also because of a reluctance to allow an outsider into the intimate, inside sphere of the *uchi*, a word that means both inside and home.
Similar difficulties are recorded by Kondo(1990) in her interviews of women at work, and she also notes that it was far easier to obtain a coherent, detailed, narrative from senior men, who were able to give their time more freely.

relatively well-off women) and no small children to occupy her. Mrs Matsumoto invokes medical advice as her reason for re-entering the workforce, and Mrs Miura repeats the argument put to her by the chief, "It's not yet time to take it easy".

This view of women's outside work as an appropriate, even laudable, alternative to being a full-time housewife, exists in counterpoint to the widely perceived opposition of husbands to their own wives working. This opposition may derive from social norms concerning the husband's role as "pillar of the household", and main financial provider, as examined in further detail in Chapter Eight, where notions of masculinity require at least a token opposition to one's wife participating in the labour force. That such opposition may be more token than real is suggested by Mrs Matsumoto's experience, an experience echoed by many of my female acquaintances, who commented, "of course they (husbands) say they're against us working, but when it comes down to it and they see the extra money coming in, they're glad we're doing it."

The unspoken bargain here, as in many societies where women work outside the home, is that the husband will tolerate the situation as long as the wife continues to fulfill her role within the home, taking responsibility for all household chores and the care of children. By this bargain the masculinity of the husband and the femininity of the wife are preserved. Successful performance of this dual role is the badge of the mature woman, and is something that the women I met took pride in rather than complaining about.

Indeed, performing this undoubtedly exhausting balancing act acts as one public marker for women of the possession of a quality much prized in

Japan and thought to be an essential part of mature adulthood for both sexes - the ability to endure and persevere - *gaman*. While for men *gaman* may be displayed solely in the workplace, through putting in long hours and taking few holidays, for women *gaman* is displayed in the equally long working days they put in caring for their families and engaging in outside activities. And just as the man is subject to the judgement of his fellows if he fails to leave the company late every night, so are women's daily routines scrutinised and judged by their neighbours.

Early rising, engaging in activities outside the home during the daytime, and returning home to perform shopping and cooking tasks and await the husband's return in the evening constitute the normative daily routine. Early rising can be gauged by the time at which the bedding is hung outside to air, and the laundry to dry. Both these should be done first thing in the morning before going to work. Presence or absence from home in the day time can be assessed by almost any passer by through a glance at the windows, and Kondo records the irritation of her landlady at the disparaging comments of her mother-in-law's friends, who would peer through the window in the daytime, and find her "idle" - engaged perhaps in reading a book (Kondo 1990:278-9).

To engage in outside work or study for the mature woman thus provides a visible sign of industriousness that raises her status in the eyes of the neighbourhood - provided always that her bedding is still aired at the correct time of day, and that she is otherwise seen to be fulfilling her domestic role .[26] Within this context, women seem almost to vie with one

[26]The delegation of such tasks to hired help is both frowned on and extremely rare, and children of either sex are not now routinely called upon to help as parents tend to fear that this will interfere with their studies. This is in contrast to the situation in pre-war Japan, where it was common for children to be involved in domestic tasks from an early age.

another for endurance points, recounting tales of studying by waking at 4.00 a.m. every morning to study while the rest of the family sleeps, or perhaps 5.00 a.m. to prepare lunch boxes for children and husband before preparing for work herself. Food is bought fresh daily, and ready-made dinners shunned - as in the example of Mrs Matsumoto who still takes pride in preparing a "proper" dinner for her family, despite the increasingly heavy demands of work, which now continues until 8.00 p.m. every night.

This quality of *gaman* in the mature adult, whether female or male, is often contrasted with the perceived absence of this ability in young people, and an exposure to *kurō*, suffering, is often said to be a necessary part of the process of maturation. Mrs Arakawa recounts leaving her Kyushu home for Tokyo and the cramped conditions in the company dormitory as a part of this *kurō*, which she now believes to have disappeared, with correspondingly deleterious effects on the new recruits. Older employees often blame a lack of *gaman* for the high turnover rates among young female employees, a common source of complaint, voiced by Mrs Noguchi in her narrative above.

However, the performance of this balancing act between home and workplace which wins a woman approbation in the eyes of her neighbourhood and at least acceptance of the situation by her husband and family also marginalises her from the point of view of the workplace. The domestic demands on female employees are seen as incompatible with taking on a responsible senior position in the company, with the result that the stereotype of the career woman is a single woman living alone. It is significant that Miss Ushijima attributed her success at least in part to her single status, as the fact that consequently "my time is my own". And the reason given by Mrs Matsumoto for not seeking promotion beyond the

rank of section chief was that this would involve accepting transfers, with correspondingly disruptive effects on her domestic life. But perhaps the most telling example here is that of Mrs Arakawa, who, despite an expressed desire to work, in the end resigned citing as a reason inability to fulfil her domestic duties and commute to work at Futajimaya - a conflict, which, it might be noted, does not appear to have been a problem for her husband, who, of course, continued to work at the company.

Whether or not Mrs Arakawa actually resigned because other pressures had been brought to bear is, in a sense, irrelevant. The point is that it was an explanation that was instantly accepted, with no apparent surprise among her fellow employees that a woman who had accumulated sixteen years of experience within the company, and was an efficient and well-liked section chief, should give up her job to become a low-paid part-timer in another store. From their point of view, Mrs Arakawa was following the approved norm in putting her domestic life first, and her planned move to part-time status in another company was appropriate to her age and marital status.[27] By making this move she fulfilled the expectations of Japan's idealised female lifecourse.

However, it is also evident from these narratives that not everyone follows this idealised lifecourse, and that much greater commitment may be made to a company by its female employees than the marginalisation of women in the official company discourse suggests. Miss Ushijima's case illustrates that it is possible for women to opt for staying single, and to develop a career, although the link she makes between her single status and her

[27]This was despite the fact that, since she had no children, she did not actually need the main benefit that part-time work offers: shorter hours to fit in better with the school day, and the flexibility to take time off as necessary for the exigencies of childcare.

success in work terms is suggestive of the barriers faced by married women in Japan.

Of the other cases considered, Mrs Matsumoto shows that for women marriage can be combined with a high level of commitment to the company, given a supportive family, while Mrs Miura's case in particular, shows the dedication and personal loyalty that may be brought to the company even by the low-paid female part-time employees. This divergence from the gendered norms of company-employee relations may also be seen in the narratives of male employees given in Chapter Eight, in which, in the mirror image of Mrs Miura, dedication to and absorption by the company are often far less than that depicted as the norm for male company employees in Japan.

Chapter Eight

Constructions of masculinity: *sarariiman* and *daikokubashira*

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven examined the way in which employment and the domestic sphere interact in women's lives in a complex fashion. On leaving formal education, most women enter employment for a variable period that may extend from six to ten years, or even longer. For these urbanised women, employment is the means of achieving adulthood as defined in the notion of *shakaijin*, in contrast to the account given by Hendry of rural Japan, where marriage was said to mark the transition to adulthood for both men and women (Hendry 1981:206-7).

Although marriage puts pressure on women employees to prioritise the domestic sphere, it was shown in the narratives presented that for women the division between employment and domesticity was rarely clear-cut. For many women, the salary provided by their employment was essential in order to support the domestic sphere, while for others employment was a way of avoiding the appearance of idleness, once the busy period of rearing pre-school children was past. In any event, part of the construction of mature womanhood in Japan would seem to be the ability to cope with the demands of both domesticity and activities outside the home, whether this involves paid employment, or, for more well-to-do women, studying, taking up a hobby, or doing voluntary work.

Similarly, for men, constructions of masculinity are more complex than the depiction of the Japanese man as a *sarariiman* enveloped by his company would imply. As for women, generation is important, with an analogous period of young independent adulthood between entering the

workforce and getting married. And for men too, marriage, and ensuing domestic responsibilities constitute an important watershed: indeed mature manhood is linked with, and dependent on, constructions of the male role within the household.

An important notion here is that of *daikokubashira*,[1] a term literally meaning big black pillar, and referring to the main pillar supporting a traditional Japanese house, which at one time would have been blackened with age and smoke from the hearth. However it also has a secondary meaning, translated into English as breadwinner, referring to the household head and his support for the household through his outside economic activity. Without the *daikokubashira,* the house would collapse, and this term very vividly conveys the importance of the (usually male) household head to the household. Although this term can be applied to women, it is more usually associated with men, and becoming the *daikokubashira* of one's own household is an index of mature manhood.[2]

The concept of *daikokubashira* also serves to link company and household, now that Japan is largely urbanised and most of the male population are employees of one sort or another. It is through his work at the company that a man is able to fulfil his role of *daikokubashira*, and his obligation to fulfil this role gives the company an important hold over him that is absent in the case of a female employee. An employee of a large company is a more desirable husband and son-in-law than an employee of a small company, and certainly than a casual labourer, and hence there is a good deal of pressure on young men to find such employment at least by the

[1] Daikoku is also the name given to the Shinto *kami* (god) of prosperity.

[2] For the eldest son and successor of a household this role also extends to providing for his mother and unmarried siblings after his father's death, even if they are not in fact co-resident.

time they enter their mid to late twenties and are getting to marriageable age. The free part-time worker (*furiita*) phenomenon commented on in Chapter Four, section 4.4, is therefore characteristic of young unmarried men, with a shift to more secure employment evident as men approach the age of marriage. This pattern is reinforced by the peculiarities of the Japanese labour market, which, as outlined in Chapter Four, favours far greater mobility among young men than their older counterparts.

The apparent envelopment of mature men by their companies in Japan is therefore, ironically, a phenomenon very much contingent on notions of mature masculinity as defined by role in the household, with salaryman (*sarariiman*) and *daikokubashira* being logically paired concepts. As for women, the quality of *gaman* is important, but for the man this is manifested by the ability to endure long hours of hard work outside the home. Male company employees in Japan are internationally famous for the long hours they put in at the office, and Kondo recounts how the male artisans in the company where she worked would put in twenty-two hour days in busy periods (Kondo 1990:244).

However, the achievement of a mature gendered identity is perhaps more problematic for men in Japan than for women, in that this ideal normative destiny for the mature man is cross-cut by quite a different discourse on masculinity, as manifested in Japanese popular culture. Images of the salaryman's life in Japanese comic books and films tend to be quite negative, portraying a world of servile sycophantic juniors, time-servers, and tyrannical superiors. In so far as there are heroes in this genre, their appeal tends to be in the way they subvert the formal system for their own ends. One example is the popular manga character Shima-kun, upwardly mobile and highly manipulative section chief, who wins praise from his

superiors for his loyalty and dedication to the company while the reader is made aware that his main interests in life are winning promotion and seducing as many women as possible. Shima-kun himself reflects that "I don't have any particular loyalty to the company."

As far as the domestic side of the salaryman's life is concerned, the father of the family too is often portrayed in a less than sympathetic light, often a target for the bullying of wife and children in an inversion of the supposedly normative role of the father of the household. In one such portrayal, the comedy film"Crazy Family", the father eventually asserts himself by attempting to murder his wife and children, a drastic solution to which, the viewer is led to feel, he has been driven by their impossible demands.

The figure of salaryman and father thus is often portrayed as more victim and figure of fun than role model. Heroic masculinity tends to be cast in a different mould. Even in comic books that glorify the ideals of *gaman* and dedication to work, the protagonists are often not company employees but artisans, who perfect their skill through a long and arduous apprenticeship. Examples include carpenters, sushi makers, and even in one story, thieves. Here, Kondo's account of constructions of masculinity among the artisans with whom she worked becomes relevant:

> A full-fledged artisan is also a full-fledged *man*: able to make a living by his arm or technique, tough and able to withstand long hours and deprivation, in stereotype and sometimes in actuality a strong silent type, the embodiment of one sort of masculinity... a mature artisan is a man who, in crafting fine objects, crafts a finer self.
>
> (Kondo 1990: 241)

The artisan may thus be closer than the salaryman to an ideal of Japanese masculinity, but at the same time falls outside the elite of the Japanese workforce. The social hierarchy and cultural constructions of masculinity cross-cut and pull in opposite directions.

Nor is it only the ideal of the male as company employee that is undermined in Japanese popular culture: the notions of the male as harmonious member of the group and pillar of the household are also called into question. In stark contrast to company discourse on harmonious group relations, male heroes of Japanese comics, popular literature and film are often loners, rejecting both group affiliation and domesticity, true only to some higher goal (such as retribution for wrong-doing, a popular theme in period dramas) and perhaps one or two select male friends. This type of male hero has been identified as an archetype of masculinity in manga (Schodt 1983), and in film (Barrett 1989), as well as in more general discussions of popular culture (see, for example, Buruma 1984).

In period dramas, one example of this type of male hero may be found in the popular saga set in the Tokugawa era of the assassin Baian, who features both in short stories and in a television drama. Baian is publicly an acupuncturist and doctor, but also works as an assassin in secret. His only close friend is a man, also a hired assassin, and he treats women with a contempt that, we are told, stems from his hatred of his mother, who left home when he was a small child, taking his sister with her but leaving Baian behind. In one of the early Baian stories he ends up murdering his long lost sister, only later discovering her identity. Baian, however, feels no remorse, and the reader is made to feel that, promiscuous and treacherous like her mother, the sister richly deserved her fate (Ikenami 1991). The Baian story is particularly interesting in that it counterposes a pure and honourable masculinity with a corrupt and polluted femininity.

This tension finds its expression in a male violence that is, in a number of Baian stories, directed against women.[3]

A more recent example of the unattached male as hero is the popularity of the *furiita* (free temporary worker) as a character in television dramas in the early 1990s. The favourite television drama of the young Futajimaya employees, "The End of this World", referred to in Chapter Seven, featured one such man as its main character. This particular archetype runs in direct opposition to the role of salaryman: the *furiita* rejects the notion of attachment to a single company as an infringement of his freedom and independence. The *furiita* is also the inverse of the ideal represented by the *daikokubashira* - in television dramas at least, he rarely has his own apartment and appears unable and unwilling to support a family. The *furiita* is thus depicted as turning his back on domestic ties, remaining a romantic loner, heir to a long tradition of similar male characters in Japanese popular culture.

It has been argued that these apparent challenges contained in Japanese popular culture to the status quo of Japanese society are mere safety valves in an oppressive culture (Buruma 1984). It might also be argued that one should be wary of giving these alternative discourses of masculinity too much weight since those who produce these images - comic book illustrators and writers, film producers, writers of popular novels - are themselves outsiders to the elite company system, artisans of a kind who might be expected to glorify alternatives to the salaryman. However it seems that in narratives of life course produced by mature Japanese men

[3]Notions of masculinity as pure, opposed to femininity which is polluted, are of ancient origin in Japan, going back to the Shinto creation myths as described for example by Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:36). The link between violence against women in popular culture and notions of purity and masculinity has been commented on by Moeran (1986).

there is a recurring sense of inner conflict between these competing discourses of masculinity: material and social success as represented by the elite track of becoming a large company employee; the responsibilities to home and family encapsulated by the notion of *daikokubashira*; and the personal, idiosyncratic, pure masculinity represented by the loner who refuses normative social values. Often it seems that this conflict is expressed in life-histories full of what-ifs and might have beens, where the compromise of self is enforced by the transition at marriage, at which point romantic ideals of masculinity are abandoned and the unglamourous roles of company employee and father become inescapable. The very centrality of the company in the masculine life course becomes for many a matter of apprehension or regret, with more or less secret dreams of escape and independence far from uncommon.[4]

The following narratives give some concrete examples of the workings of these themes in individual lives. As in Chapter Seven, where women employees were discussed, vignettes of younger employees and their views of work in Futajimaya are followed by the longer narratives of older employees.

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[4]This pattern is not confined to the *sarariiman* working for a large company, but is also expressed by many small independent businessmen. For example, Plath (1980) cites a middle-aged realtor who regrets never having fulfilled an early dream to become a politician and sees his life in the property business as an unpleasant necessity largely forced upon him by the responsibilities of marriage:

> Sometimes I tell myself...that if I hadn't got married I could have done what I really wanted to. Under the marital yoke it became impossible.
>
> (Plath 1980:56)

8.2 Work and the Young Man

Chida-san: the Furiita

Chida-san joined the Hatakeda branch shortly before my fieldwork ended. Cheerful, and energetic he worked long hours (usually around forty-eight hours a week) and seemed at ease in the workplace, rapidly taking on a range of tasks from which *arubaito* are usually excluded, such as helping out behind the cash desk. Talking to him, I discovered that he had been employed by another nearby branch of Futajimaya that had recently closed. He had worked in the other branch for one and a half years, that is, since shortly after graduating from high school, and had no immediate plans to leave the company, thus prompting me to ask him why he had opted for *arubaito* status rather than becoming a *seishain* directly on graduation. He replied that:

> I didn't want to become a *seishain*, so I didn't join in the recruitment drive at high school. I don't like being tied down, and if you're a *seishain* there are so many rules you have to follow. I like the freedom of being an *arubaito* - when I want to take time off I take it - and it doesn't make much difference to the salary.
>
> There used to be lots of people like me at my old branch, but there aren't many here. What happened to the rest of them? Well, some of them moved to other branches, some stopped working for Futajimaya. We had a choice - either transfer to another branch or one month's severance pay.
>
> I worked with my father for a while after I graduated - he has a sales business. I'm the eldest son, and I live alone with my father. My parents are separated - my mother took the other children and I stayed with my father. But I like working with electrical goods. I like sales too, but I prefer electrical goods. In my last branch I worked in the electrical goods section, that's why I took the job there. I hope I can move to that section in this branch. Now I'm working in haberdashery, which has nothing to do with electrical goods, but never mind. If I can't change sections here, I may try my ex-floor manager - he's moved to the Fusa branch, and he may be able to find me a place there.
>
> You know in Akihabara, (Tokyo's main electrical goods shopping area) everyone is an *arubaito* like me, there aren't any salarymen. You have to be really good there - the competition is tough, and the

> strong eat the weak. But that's all part of capitalism, isn't it? I would have liked to work there, but it's too far to travel.

For Mr Chida, there was no real incentive to become a full company member. He did not lose out financially, as his monthly earnings averaged ¥140,000, more than the basic salary of a female *seishain* who had just joined the company, and on a par with the wage received by new male entrants. Of course, he did not receive the benefits on offer to the *seishain*, most notably the subsidised dormitory accommodation, and was not eligible either for promotion or for regular pay increases. However, as an eldest son living with his father, the former was unnecessary and the latter irrelevant, as he stood to inherit his father's business in due course. For this reason, too, the job security offered by regular employee status was not important to him. Working as an *arubaito* represented an ideal stop-gap solution.

Mr Chida's remarks exuded a mild contempt for those who chose the salaryman route, stressing instead the virtues of being an *arubaito*, both for the freedom this conferred and for the fact that in the absence of guaranteed job security one's job depended on how good one was. He therefore showed a pride in "*arubaito* culture" not, perhaps, far removed from the feelings of those who, like his father, opted out of the salaryman scenario and started their own businesses. Although Chida-san's family circumstances made *arubaito* status a particularly attractive option, a number of other young male *arubaito* at the company took a similar view, and several older male *seishain* who had also worked as *arubaito* for a time seemed to look back on this period of their lives with nostalgia. For many of them, as will be explored further below, their time as *arubaito* was a period of relative freedom to follow their own aspirations before marriage forced a transition to the more constricted world of the *seishain*.

Kimura-san: the *seishain*

Kimura-san was very unlike Chida-san in a number of respects. A twenty-five-year-old university graduate in English Literature, he was generally very quiet and withdrawn, except when drunk, when he revealed an unsuspected sense of humour and a generally well-concealed ability to speak English. Although as a male university graduate he was being groomed for managerial rank, he showed no obvious aptitude or enthusiasm for the practice managerial tasks allotted to him, and was a source of concern and irritation to his floor manager.

Kimura-san was a native of Tokyo, but lived in the company dormitory in preference to his family home. He explained that he was the youngest of three brothers, the other two of whom were married, and that his mother was dead. His eldest brother together with his wife and four children lived with Mr Kimura's father (a salaryman), while the other brother lived separately. Mr Kimura said that he had had to leave home to make room for his elder brother's family. It is not common in Japan for siblings of the household heir to remain long in the same house after adulthood, and I imagine there may well also have been some tension in the household arising from the fact that the mistress of the house, responsible for the feeding and general care of its members, was no longer Mr Kimura's mother, but his brother's wife.[5]

Mr Kimura said that he had chosen Futajimaya because it was located near his family home and had a good dormitory, and because he had thought it

[5]Relations between unmarried adult siblings still resident in the household, and the wife of the household heir are often tense, as she, although once a stranger, has become a permanent member of the household, while they, despite being born there, are expected to leave (at least on marriage if not before) and establish themselves elsewhere.

would not be too demanding (*hima sō datta kara*).[6] He aimed to become manager in due course if he stayed with Futajimaya, but was considering leaving as he was concerned about the store's economic difficulties, a problem about which he seemed to have far greater awareness than any of the female staff that I interviewed. He speculated optimistically about the prospects of the chain being taken over by a competitor who might offer better working conditions and a brighter future.

About the job itself, Mr Kimura commented that it was not particularly interesting, but it was easy, and he had no problems in getting on with the other staff. His social life remained firmly centred outside the store, with most of his friends coming from the nearby area in which he had grown up.

Gender and constructions of young adulthood

Both Mr Chida and Mr Kimura's stories echo elements of the *shinjinrui* discourse of young adulthood that has already been examined when discussing the young female employees of Futajimaya. For both, the idea of independence was important, although this was interpreted in different ways owing to their different family backgrounds. For Mr Chida, independence meant rejecting the status of regular employee, which, he felt entailed too many rules. As an *arubaito* he could take time off when he wished, and dress as casually as he wished at work beneath the obligatory *arubaito* apron. Most importantly, he could avoid the feeling of being "tied down".

[6]Literally, "it looked leisurely", from *hima*, a word used to mean spare or leisure time.

However, Mr Chida, as the eldest son and heir of a man with his own small retail business, had no worries about job security or where he was going to live. Long term, his future looked assured, so he could afford to enjoy a period of commitment-free young adulthood. Mr Kimura, on the other hand, was forced by his family situation into becoming self-supporting with his own separate accommodation as soon as he graduated from University. For him, the route to independence lay through becoming a regular employee of a large company that could offer him a place to live. However, he was unsure as to whether his long term future lay with Futajimaya, and in some ways resembled the female employees we have already discussed, who joined Futajimaya because of its dormitories, as a way of leaving home, and then took time to consider what alternative options they might have.

However, where both men differed from their female counterparts is that they could both envisage a future of increased responsibility at work, Mr Chida through succeeding to his father's company, and Mr Kimura through the regular promotions offered to male *seishain* at large companies. Conversely to the women, who viewed their future in terms of increasing disengagement from the company, for these men and others like them in the company, the future appeared to hold increasing involvement in the workplace. The next section considers this gradual drawing in of male employees, to become at least in appearance more company centred.

8.3 Company Men? Middle-aged middle managers at Futajimaya

The Chief

One of the most forthcoming of the managers at the Hatakeda branch was the general office manager, a genial and very popular man who was aged forty-eight at the time I began my fieldwork. Referred to and addressed by all the employees simply as "Chief", he had apparently limitless energy and good humour, amusing himself by running the wrong way up the down escalators before the store opened in the morning, and complaining about the discomfort of having to wear a tie in hot weather, arguing that this was a most inappropriate European cultural import given the high humidity of a Tokyo summer. He would boom out greetings to me every time we met, varying the language used between English, French and Japanese, and often engaged me in conversation on the subject of Mrs Thatcher, for whom he had a deep admiration. He gained promotion and a transfer to head office shortly after I left, and the affection in which he was held by the other employees was evidenced by a very well-attended leaving party held at the store and various other drinking venues thereafter.

The chief was born in 1943, in Tokyo, and was evacuated to Okayama prefecture to escape from the war-time bombing. In 1950 he returned to live in the family home in Tokyo, which had fortunately escaped being destroyed by the fire bombing. The second son and last of four children, he described his childhood as "ordinary". His father worked as a salaryman, and the family must have been reasonably well-off, as the chief attended a private high school, and then went on to take two degrees at Waseda, one of Japan's most prestigious private universities. He initially studied

mechanical engineering, and although he did not enjoy it persisted to graduation, then re-entering to take a degree in economics.

By the time he completed his second degree he had decided he wanted to be a journalist, but failed in his attempt to get a job on a newspaper and joined a petroleum company instead. However, he lasted just two years there before having an argument with a senior and walking out, unfortunately for him shortly before he was due to marry. His parents-in-law refused to let the marriage go ahead unless he found another job, so he took the first thing he could find, which happened to be Futajimaya. At that point he said he felt he didn't care where he worked; "*doko demo ii*" - anywhere would do. In fact, he said he thought this move had turned out well, as he likes the "sticky" (friendly, close)[7] atmosphere of Futajimaya, and feels that it suits his personality.

Asked about the future, however, he said that he would still like to be a journalist, and feels this would suit his independent, self-centred (*wagamama*) personality. He expressed uneasiness about the future of Futajimaya - he hoped its current position would improve, and said he would be sad if it were to be taken over, but he thought this was a possibility as Daiei had recently acquired a large number of Futajimaya shares. If there were to be a takeover lay-offs would be inevitable in the chief's view, so he hoped that Futajimaya could at least hold out for a merger. But he hastened to add that these matters were well outside his control, and he did not really know much about the company's strategy in this respect - such questions are left to top management.

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[7]The Japanese word he used was *anko*, a word literally meaning a sticky sweet red bean paste used in Japanese sweets, but also used metaphorically in other contexts. The use of this word provides a vivid image of a feeling of group cohesiveness.

The chief had very firm views on Japanese companies and Japanese culture, and at this point veered off into more general concerns, effectively taking over the interview until it was curtailed by an unexpected power cut that plunged the whole store into darkness. He traced the distinctive nature of Japanese company relations to the feudal era via the wartime *kamikaze*, and suggested that the same loyalty once addressed by a Japanese man to his lord, or to the emperor during the war, was now directed at the company by some people. As far as the different roles of men and women were concerned he made a distinction between the generations, grouping the over forties together as *kaisha ningen* - company human beings - and saying that for his generation the norm was for the man to go out to work, while the wife stays at home and looks after the children. For the under thirties, in his view, such clear gender distinctions no longer applied.

He expressed contempt for what he described as imported American ideas - freedom and independence - saying that these notions were not really understood by the Japanese and were only paid lip-service to as a result of American influence and pressure. He said he thought it would take the Japanese another hundred years to really assimilate these notions. In any case, he saw the practical implications of freedom as being largely negative, pointing at the US, he said freedom just resulted in a society where people have to carry guns to protect themselves, where poverty is endemic, and that produces people like Mike Tyson. He thought that instead of being so preoccupied with freedom the United States would do better to tackle the poverty in their country by using taxation to redistribute income and raise the level of the poor.

It seemed to me that the chief's statements were riven with contradictions, particularly where his personal conduct and motives for joining Futajimaya were juxtaposed with his idealised image of the kamikaze salaryman. Again, on personality, his description of himself as independent and self-centred contrasted sharply with his condemnation of the idea of independence as an alien US import, and his stated preference for a company with a "sticky" atmosphere. On gender differences too, it was striking to me that the same man who had persuaded Mrs Miura to work for the company on the grounds that it was not yet time to take it easy should state so unequivocally that for women of his generation their proper place was in the home looking after their children. Perhaps something of my feelings showed on my face, because the Chief ended the interview with a brief lecture on the relative merits of different culture's ways of thought.

"You know, WASP thinking is not the only way of looking at the world. Here in Japan, the influence of Buddhism is very strong, the idea that everyone can become a Buddha after death. You Europeans have a very black and white way of thinking, but things are not so clear cut to us, because of the influence of Buddhism. So you should try to understand the other person, don't always think you are 100 per cent right. I would like foreigners to understand Japan, but I am not sure Futajimaya is a good example..."

Yamaguchi-san

In terms of personality, Mr Yamaguchi, a floor manager at the Hatakeda branch, and also a mid-career recruit, could not have been more different from the chief. A gentle, soft-spoken man aged forty-one, he was always smiling and had a great fondness for children, taking charge of my small

daughter on company trips, carrying her around and soothing her to sleep while his male colleagues drank beer.

Although he is the eldest son in his family, Mr Yamaguchi lives with his mother-in-law (his father-in-law is dead), his wife, and their sixteen-year-old daughter. His own mother is dead, and his father lives with his older sister. He went to a fairly high ranking private university, where he studied politics, economics, and the media. On graduating in 1972, he joined a company making spectacles, Hoya garasu, and for a time thought of setting up his own company as an oculist. It was at this time that many discount glasses shops were starting up, however, and the competition for small businesses in this field was intense. A friend of his tried to start up his own business, but went bankrupt, so Mr Yamaguchi decided instead to join a small glasses shop in Yokohama as an employee.

During his four years at Hoya garasu, Mr Yamaguchi married a young woman he had known from his high school days, and their daughter was born in 1975. He remembers the period as an employee at the small shop in Yokohama, from 1976 to 1980, as a happy time, since his daughter was a small child, and he was able to find plenty of time to play with her and take her out. He attributes the good relationship he has with her now to the time they spent together when she was small. However, after four years at the Yokohama shop, Mr Yamaguchi decided that he had better join a more stable company where his future prospects would be secure (by this time he was thirty, the age after which changing companies becomes increasingly difficult in Japan). Not many large companies at that time were accepting mid-career recruits, so, like the chief, he did not so much choose Futajimaya as end up there through lack of other options. However, he did express a preference for working in retail both because he enjoys

the customer contact and because for retail employees time-off is taken during the week, not on Saturday and Sunday. Mr Yamaguchi explained that all public places in Japan are impossibly crowded during the weekend, and having time off during the week enabled him to take his daughter out without having to fight the crowds.

Evidently, for Mr Yamaguchi family considerations have been important throughout his life in constraining his choices relating to work. Like the chief, his entry to Futajimaya was largely constrained by family pressures - one factor that encouraged him to seek more secure employment was that both of his parents-in-law and his wife had become ill. Medical treatment can be expensive in Japan, and the kind of back-up that large company welfare schemes can give in this situation was probably an incentive for him to move, though he did not give this as a reason. He did explain to me, however, that family considerations were the reason that, unusually for a male employee, he opted to take the status of zone employee, thus opting out of transfers outside a specified geographical area, and putting himself on a promotion ladder that stops at the rank of floor manager. Mr Yamaguchi simply said that his family could not be moved, and he did not wish to leave his family.

Mr Yamaguchi enjoys his work, he likes sales and is content where he is. He says he has no desire for promotion, which in any case is barred to him because of his employment status. He finds Futajimaya an exceptionally friendly company, and also enjoys the contact with customers. His leisure time is divided between Futajimaya-linked *tsukiai*,[8] non-Futajimaya friends and family. He practises the Japanese martial arts of judo and aikido

[8] *Tsukiai* is a kind of socialising that is done with people with whom one is linked by work (either clients or fellow employees), and has the ring of obligation rather than pleasure, although of course in practice it tends to be a mixture of the two.

once a week on one of his two days off, and his fellow practitioners form one circle of friends, with the other being old high-school friends, a group that includes his wife. His daughter continues to be a focal point in his life, and he would often engage me in conversations about child-rearing and education.

Kohama-san

Mr Kohama, the branch manager at Hatakeda at the time I joined, had had a career with Futajimaya more in keeping with ideal norms for Japanese male company employees than either the chief or Mr Yamaguchi. Originally from north-eastern Japan, he joined Futajimaya immediately on graduation, and the only unusual feature here was that he was a graduate of a junior college, not a four year university, as is usual with male recruits.

Mr Kohama was also able to offer positive reasons for his choice of Futajimaya. Although most of his college friends went to banks or other companies in the financial sector, such work did not appeal to Mr Kohama, who said he preferred sales to office work as he wanted to do something where one could see immediate results from one's efforts. In Futajimaya, such results could be obtained in two senses: sales targets give the employee a ready measure of his achievements, and at the time he joined the company (around 1970), it was a relatively high ranking company within the chain store sector, and prospects for the company to expand and for the individual to achieve promotion within it looked good.

For Mr Kohama, employment at Futajimaya initially seemed to fulfil this early promise. He achieved promotion rapidly, attaining the rank of floor manager in just five years, and that of deputy branch manager three years

after that, while still in his twenties. A mere thirteen years after joining the company he reached the rank of branch manager, the first of his intake to reach this level(most of them had still not achieved the rank of branch manager seven years later). Barely into his forties, Mr Kohama was both younger and had a lower level of education than most of his male subordinates at managerial level.

Mr Kohama was eager to make himself appear friendly and accessible, and to de-emphasise differentials of rank, saying that Japan's strength was the ability of employees to cooperate together, and that even a young female employee at the bottom of the store hierarchy could speak freely to him. He also stressed the importance of socialising after hours, and said that in post-war Japan differentials of rank could be forgotten in this non-work context. In this sense, he felt that Japanese society had changed from the more status conscious pre-war period. He characterised Futajimaya as the most "democratic" and "free" of the large chain stores.

Mr Kohama did not talk much about his family, which consisted of a wife and two children. He had been transferred many times in the course of his career at Futajimaya, and until his posting to the Hatakeda branch his family had followed him wherever he went. On this occasion, however, it had not been convenient for them to do so, and Mr Kohama therefore lived alone in a company-owned apartment a short walk from the store. However, as his wife and children lived in another suburb of Tokyo he was able to visit them on days off. But when asked how he felt about his frequent moves, he did not mention family considerations as a problem, but rather said that the most difficult thing about moving was dealing with the different dialects and customs that exist in different parts of Japan.

In the event, Mr Kohama's and my period of employment at the Hatakeda branch coincided closely, with Mr Kohama joining and leaving a few months earlier than I did. As I had been his protegé at the branch, he came to say goodbye to me personally in the section where I worked, and to offer to introduce me to the branch manager who would be taking over from him when he left. I asked him if he would be sorry to go, and he said that he would, as he felt he had only just started to settle down at the Hatakeda branch, and one year was really too short. He also said that the transfer had come as a surprise to him, and in fact there was no job for him to go to. His current post had been given to the branch manager of a neighbouring branch that had to close, and he had been named as branch manager of a projected future branch that would open in around a year's time. But for the moment, there was no work for him to do. I suggested that this was a perfect opportunity for him to take some leisure time with his family, but he demurred, looking less than happy about the situation.

Although Mr Kohama was given a well-staged leaving party, arranged to do double duty as a farewell to him and a welcome to the new branch manager, attending the chief's party subsequently made me realise that Mr Kohama's party had been rather lacking in warmth. And at a subsequent company social event where I ran into him, I found him for the most part standing alone with his drink, being deliberately avoided by his former subordinates at the Futajimaya branch, who instead clustered around the new branch manager. On this occasion, Mr Kohama complained to me that his current position as branch manager without a branch, and without named employees, left him utterly bereft of a social network.

Although he did not say so, his position was made more difficult by the fact that he had spent most of his working life up to his transfer to Hatakeda in

Western Japan, and therefore had few personal contacts among staff in the Tokyo area. And, having graduated from a junior college, unlike most male employees, who tended to be university graduates, he was excluded from the various old boy networks within the company. In retrospect, I realised that even when he had been branch manager at Hatakeda, it had often been difficult for him to personally order that something be done where cooperation from employees at head office or at other branches was involved, instead having to ask his subordinates to use their connections on his behalf. In a sense, then, Mr Kohama provides an example of the vulnerability of even a male employee of a large company who apparently does everything by the book, works hard, and achieves promotion. Without a personal network that is highly contingent on, for example, university attended and having a long enough posting somewhere to establish social bonds as well as formal ties of superior-subordinate, a male Japanese company employee may find himself in a very isolated position.

8.4 Overview: The role of employment in the construction of masculinity in Japan

What do these three longer narratives tell us about constructions of masculinity and employment experiences at a large company in Japan? The first two point to the importance marriage and family considerations play in the life courses of many men, with employment at a large company often seen as a necessary sacrifice that has to be made in order to obtain a bride or to ensure the security of one's household. These were themes echoed by many of the older male employees, both mid-career recruits and those who joined straight from university.

And unlike the artisan, where personal growth may be thought to be achieved through the exercise of his craft, in the first two cases above the

company was seen as something to be made the best of. For both these men their dreams lay elsewhere - for the chief in his long-standing ambition to be a journalist; and for Mr Yamaguchi in his relationship with his family, in particular his daughter, and perhaps also in his study of the martial arts. For both these men, who, I stress again, were by no means unusual cases, the image of the company "enveloping" its male employees seems singularly inappropriate.

The irony is that of the three men, it is Mr Kohama, outwardly the most conformist, who appeared to enjoy the least popularity with his male colleagues, and also found that the company as an organisation failed to provide him with the personal support he needed. In this case we seem to have a man entirely willing to dedicate himself to the company and to be enveloped by it, who in the end stands alone. But it may be that this particular narrative has a happy end: the store to which Mr Kohama was nominally posted in 1991 eventually opened in the autumn of 1992, in an area nearby where his wife and children were living, enabling his family to be re-united. And I heard that another former Hatakeda manager had been transferred to this store, giving Mr Kohama at least one subordinate in his new undertaking with whom he had developed some ties - this was the manager to whom Mr Kohama had entrusted me for the duration of my fieldwork, and with whom he had collaborated in ensuring me access to all the information the manager, an anthropology graduate of a prestigious university, could muster through his own old-boy network.

A further theme in these narratives is uncertainty about the future. In contrast to the formal discourse of employment in large companies, in which the future of male company members is depicted as assured, for these men, employed in a declining company, the future was a matter for

anxiety. Possible takeover and ensuing redundancy was a fear voiced by the chief, while Mr Kohama, the branch manager, was shocked by his abrupt sidelining from what, until then, had seemed a promising career progression. Of the three, Mr Yamaguchi seemed the least worried, expressing contentment with his present situation, together with a determined focussing of his life outside the company.

These responses are fairly representative of those I obtained from most middle-aged male employees - a mixture of unease about the future and the expressed hope that they would be able to retain their current positions. Another manager, who had already experienced redundancy from a chain store that was taken over twenty years previously, said that his ambition was simply to continue as he was. He added, "now most people will say this, but before they would have been hoping for promotion."

The concerns of this generation of male employees emerged clearly in the Futajimaya company union survey.[9] Although a majority of male employees in every age group thought that Futajimaya had no chance of future expansion, the percentage expressing this opinion was highest (62.9 per cent) among the 43-46 year old age group.[10] And as far as their future progression within the company was concerned, nearly half those aged 43-46 stated they hoped to continue in their present position, a figure that rose to 59 per cent for men over forty-seven. It is important to note here that although these feelings of gloom among middle managers were undoubtedly exacerbated by Futajimaya's insecure position, they are not uniquely attributable to it. Men of this generation everywhere in Japan find themselves in an awkward situation: there are only a limited number

[9]Full details of this survey are given in Chapter Three, section 3.2.
[10]Most of the managers at the Hatakeda branch belonged to this age group.

of positions in senior management available, thus restricting the scope for promotion, and, as part of the post-war baby boom generation they face far more competition in numerical terms from men of the same age cohort than do the younger men in the company.

8.5 Conclusion. Gender, maturity, and work: The Futajimaya case

Taking as a whole the narratives in this chapter and in Chapter Seven, it would seem that there is a great deal of overlap in the ways in which employee-company relations are constructed for both men and women in the early period of adulthood that precedes marriage. For both, Futajimaya offers *shakaijin* status; a way to leave home and live independently; and a salary which empowers them as *shinjinrui*, the new generation of urbanised consumers. However, within this frame, long-term commitment is expected of men, but not of women, leading some men who do not wish to make such a commitment or to accept the constraints imposed by company membership to opt instead for the role of *arubaito*, while working full-time at the company. For women, who are not considered as committed to the company in any event, and who would not be able to leave home without the dormitory accommodation offered by the company, *arubaito* status has few attractions, and I did not meet any female *arubaito* except for the floating student population while I was working at Futajimaya.

For both men and women, marriage appears as a watershed, marking the transition to a second stage of adulthood, in which obligations to others, both in the domestic sphere and in the workplace, become more emphasised. From this juncture, for women life becomes notionally centred on the household, and for men on the workplace. However, neither is as completely enveloped by their respective gendered spheres as the common

opposition in publications on Japan of salaryman to full-time housewife,[11] would suggest. One corollary of this is that the relations of both sexes with their company in middle age are more complex than implied by the workplace archetypes of the marginal part-time female employee and the committed male manager.

A significant minority of mature female employees are not, in any case, part-timers, and even for those who are, involvement with the company is often a long-term affair. Whether or not they enjoy their work, their ability to move competently between the domains of home and workplace is something in which they take pride, endeavouring, from what I was able to observe, to do their best in both domains. The part-timers, in particular, often comment on the lack of recognition of or reward for their accomplishments, particularly in terms of their low pay, a sore point with many.[12]

Surprisingly, however, evaluation of Futajimaya relative to other Japanese companies is more positive among female than among male employees, cross-cutting the expected gender stereotypes. The company union survey of 1991 showed that 53.6 per cent of male employees rated Futajimaya negatively compared to other Japanese companies, as compared to 34.2 per cent of female *seishain*, and only 28.1 per cent of the part-timers surveyed.[13] Even more surprising though was the response by nearly a third of all employees in all categories of age, employment status and gender, that they actively disliked Futajimaya as a company. Broken down by age, among the male employees dislike for the company was strongest

[11]See, for example, Vogel 1963.

[12]68.4 per cent of the part-timers questioned in the company survey thought their wages were too low.

[13]As noted above in Chapter Three, only one subcategory of part-timer, the *teijishain*, were included in the company survey.

in the 25-29 year old age group, where it reached 44.3 per cent, but even for the over forties the figure was nearly 30 per cent.

The overwhelming impression conveyed by the data in the company union survey matches closely with that from the first two of the three narratives of male employees given above: less a feeling of positive dedication to the company than a feeling that this is what they are stuck with, so they might as well make the best of it. A breakdown by age of male employees stating that they wished to leave Futajimaya, whether to set up business on their own or to join another company, showed that such a wish was expressed by close to 40 per cent of the under thirties, but only around 7 per cent of the over forties. Previous survey results (from 1981 and 1986) showed a drop in the percentage of the same cohort desiring to leave with increasing age, so the difference between the generations here stems perhaps less from a greater company loyalty among the older generation than a growing perception that, in the context of the Japanese job market, it is now too late to do more than stay put and hope for the best.

This brings us, by way of concluding comments to this chapter, to the notion of *ikigai*, an important concept in Japanese, and correspondingly difficult to translate. Here I shall adopt the gloss suggested by Plath (1980) - "what makes life worth living". I have suggested above that for women *ikigai* is fairly clearly centred on the household, although work plays an important role, and may indeed be, as Kondo (1990) argues, an index of her commitment to the household.

For men, however, the picture is more complex, with a 1989 survey on *ikigai* showing that "over 50% of men in their thirties through fifties cited working hard *to support the family*" (Economic Planning Agency 1990: 136,

emphasis mine). In this survey, work and household are not clearly separated, rather the one depends on the other, but an earlier survey cited by Plath shows a mere 10 per cent of male respondents in their forties citing work as what makes life worth living, compared to over 50 per cent citing family or children (Plath 1980:91). The company cannot, therefore be assumed to be the all-enveloping focus of the Japanese male employee's life: official company discourse notwithstanding, to a large extent the man's work outside the home serves to validate him as *daikokubashira* and mature male, and it is this, rather than loyalty to or love of the company that serves to bind him to his employer. And although discourse on company life directed at outsiders may stress company loyalty and harmony (as in the chief's explanation of "the Japanese company"), other forms of discourse such as personal histories, or responses to an internal company survey not intended for outside eyes, reveal other, more personal, agendas and frustrations, for men as well as for women.

Chapter Nine

Harmony and consensus? employee relations in the workplace

9.1 Introduction

Having considered in Chapters Seven and Eight the varying perspectives of some individual employees concerning their relationships with their employer, Futajimaya, this chapter turns to a consideration of employees relationships with each other in the workplace. The focus here is on an assessment of two features often said to characterise the Japanese workplace: harmonious interpersonal relations (see for example Rohlen 1974); and the hierarchical, "vertical" structuring of these relations (Nakane 1970). As a preliminary step to exploring these issues, an average working day at the Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya is described in the following section.

9.2 The Working Day at Futajimaya, Hatakeda branch

Daily work at Futajimaya is organised mainly on the section level, although all the sections on one floor are under the supervision of a single floor manager, and employees of all sections gather together every morning for a meeting of all the employees on that floor. Each section is composed of a number of *pāto* (usually two or three), one or two *seishain*, and sometimes one or two *arubaito*. Typically, each section may therefore have five or six members, and is usually, though not always, headed by a section chief (*bumonchō*). The section chief must always be a *seishain*, and so the post may not be filled if there is no *seishain* available with sufficient relevant experience. In such a case, the section will usually be unofficially headed by a senior *pāto*, often a *teijishain* (a subcategory of *pāto* with company

union membership and hence greater job security).[1] Unlike the official section chief, these unofficial heads receive no compensation in their salary for the increased responsibilities their job entails.

Within the section, one of the *seishain* may be a *shinnyūsei*, still undergoing on-the-job training. Where this is the case, the *shinnyūsei* is allocated a *shidō pātonā* (guiding partner), who is generally the official or unofficial head of the section. In addition to running the section, this *shidō pātonā* then takes on the responsibility of training the *shinnyūsei* in the daily work of the section over the first six months of his or her employment. Watching and imitating one's *shidō pātonā* are an important part of learning to do the job, and the *shidō pātonā* will gradually allocate more and more responsibility to the *shinnyūsei*, according to a centrally-established timetable of training. Regular meetings of all the *shidō pātonā*, together with the manager in charge of training, are held to discuss the progress of the *shinnyūsei*, and the best way of dealing with any problems that may arise.

Aside from the various sections of Futajimaya proper, each floor also contains one or more small shops which rent space from the store. Some of these are, in fact, subsidiary companies of Futajimaya, and in this case their members will also join in the morning meetings. The appearance of the staff at morning meetings is therefore quite mixed: male *seishain* in sober suits, female *seishain* and *pāto* indistinguishable, except for age, in Futajimaya uniforms, *arubaito* in casual clothes and aprons (pink for women, blue for men), and employees of subsidiary companies in their own company's uniform.

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[1] See Chapter Three, section 3.4, for an explanation of the various employment statuses within Futajimaya.

The working day begins with the morning meeting or *chōrei*, which is taken by the floor manager if he is working that day, or otherwise by one of section chiefs or a male *seishain*. [2] This meeting is held at 9.45 a.m., just prior to the store's opening at 10.00 a.m., and always follows a set pattern. The tannoy system, broadcast throughout the store, asks the staff if they are ready and says that the morning meeting will commence shortly. Everyone then assembles on their respective floors around a sort of mobile notice board, wheeled out of the manager's office for the meeting. The meeting begins with the person in charge greeting all those assembled. This greeting is returned by the other employees with a slight bow. Then a register is taken, and the names of those who will be absent or are on a later shift are also read out. Then the meeting leader goes through a list of points he or she has previously written up on a chart, and the other employees take notes in company notebooks provided for this purpose.

The first point is always who will represent the floor at the store entrance when employees line up to greet the customers at the store's opening (any female employee below the rank of section manager), and who will do other jobs such as man the register and turn on the electricity. Other topics vary - often the staff are reminded of special offers in the store that day, or the current monthly campaign (each store has a theme for a campaign every month, for example cleanness, greetings, TOUCH heart).[3] Special store events are also noted, for example the anniversary of the store's opening, when prize draws take place and free gifts are distributed to customers. The most common item on the agenda is probably sales — targets and sales achieved. These are broken down section by section, and sections

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[2]Female *seishain* below the rank of section chief never take a morning meeting, but their male counterparts do as part of their grooming for higher management positions.
[3]See Chapter Ten.

which are not reaching their targets are urged to try harder. Reasons for not achieving targets may also be discussed — for example warm weather reducing sales of winter clothing (which on at least one occasion led on to quite an animated discussion after the meeting about the greenhouse effect).

Sometimes the meeting leader will conduct a random test of the staff on questions such as the day's sales target for each section (except for *arubaito*, staff are all expected to know this for their own section - the information is available in a large book kept next to the cash register). Staff not producing the correct answer are then reprimanded, and urged to make sure they know in future. The extent to which such tests are conducted, and the general tone of the meeting varies considerably depending on who is conducting it. On the floor where I was employed, the floor manager took a very relaxed attitude to the meetings, generally starting them late, and rarely quizzing the staff. In contrast, one of the section chiefs (a young woman) was very strict, started meetings early, reprimanded the inevitable stragglers, and tested everyone regularly on sales targets. It seems that within broad guide-lines, the way in which a meeting is conducted is very much up to the person leading it.

The meeting is concluded by a group practice of the five basic expressions used towards customers. For this, one employee stands in front of the others and says each expression, followed by a bow. The other employees repeat in chorus, also bowing. Practice is concluded by the practice leader saying, *Mo ichinichi ganbarimashō* (let's do our best for another day), to which the others reply in chorus, *Hai, ganbarimasu* (Yes, we'll do our best). The five basic expressions are:

1. *Irasshaimase* (Welcome)

2. *Osore irimasu ga* (Sorry, but...)

3. *Shōshō omachi kudasaimase* (Please wait a moment)

4. *Omatase itashimashita* (Sorry to keep you waiting)

5. *Arigatō gozaimashita. Mata okoshi kudasaimase.* (Thank you. Please come again.)

After the practice, the floor representative goes to the entrance of the store, where a representative from each floor together with the branch manager and deputy branch manager stand in a line. Other employees do some last minute tidying of their section, before going to the edge of their section as the loud speakers begin the pre-opening announcements. These are always the same, and, roughly translated, ask the staff if they have completed the preparations for the store's opening and exhort them to do their best for another day. The company song is then broadcast, and all the employees listen in silence. After the song has finished, the doors are opened to customers, and all the staff bow to the customers and say "*irasshaimase* " as they come in. The bowing at the store entrance/ section edges continues for five minutes, after which the staff at the entrance disperse, and everyone sets about their daily work. Thereafter, staff only bow to greet customers as they approach their own section.

The first morning task is to tidy and clean the section, which also involves restocking the shelves. After that, the pattern varies somewhat depending on the day of the week. The busiest days are Mondays and Thursdays, as the deadline for ordering new stock is Monday afternoon, and the stock is delivered and must be put on the shelves on Thursdays. Lunch breaks are one hour, work then resumes until leaving time, which can be any time up to 7.00, when the store closes, depending on the category of employee and the shift she is working. Generally, the *pāto* start early, and finish by 4.45

p.m., while the *seishain* take a later shift, staying until the store closes. This is because of the family commitments of the *pāto*, and results in the store being particularly short-staffed after 5.00 p.m., the busiest time of day. *Arubaito* are therefore used in the evenings to try to solve this problem. It also results in very long days for those of the *seishain* with managerial responsibilities, who must take it in turns to supervise the opening of the store, arriving by about 9.15 a.m. and often not leaving until 7.30 or 8.00 p.m., when the last duties of the day are completed.

At the end of the day, the total takings for each section are calculated, and the daily report for each section is filled in in a large folder kept near the cash register. This notes any particular features of sales that day, for example, "typhoon, good sales of umbrellas and rainwear", and the total sales achieved for that day and for the month so far. The percentage of the daily sales target achieved is also noted. The report is usually filled in by the *seishain* on the section, partly because by closing time most of the *pāto* have gone home, and those remaining are a mix of *seishain* and *arubaito*. The *arubaito* are not trained to do jobs considered complex, such as the filling in of reports.

All employees are expected to observe certain basic rules, firstly to be punctual (a check is kept on this through the use of a clock on clock off system); secondly to respect the company code for employees' appearance;[4] and thirdly to be punctilious about greeting customers and keeping a bright smiling face at all times. These rules are not, however, consistently observed in practice—employees do leave collar buttons undone, tie up their

[4]This is quite detailed - see illustration in Appendix Four of the picture of a correctly attired female employee. This picture is prominently displayed in the staff area of the store and distributed to all full time employees as part of their training material re: dress code.

hair with the wrong colour ribbons, and fail to smile at customers, and managers often turn a blind eye to these details.[5]

In any event, discipline, and the organisation of work within a section is largely left up to the section chief, and even the person occupying this position rarely needs to intervene actively. The more experienced staff all know exactly what has to be done, and each tends to take charge of a particular line of goods within the section as far as ordering is concerned. Only the *arubaito*, *shinnyūsei*, and newly recruited *pāto* really need to be told what to do. Otherwise, everyone gets on with the work with remarkably little chatting or timewasting. To understand why this should be so, it is helpful to look at the internal organisation of the sections in further detail.

9.3 Hierarchy and Group Harmony: the Futajimaya case

The sections into which the workforce at the Futajimaya branches are divided are, as described above, heterogeneous - in terms of employment status and generation, and sometimes gender, although there are so many women employed at the lower levels of Futajimaya that a number of the sections are composed solely of female employees. This heterogeneity has important consequences for the way in which daily work is conducted, and also for the interpersonal relations between section members. This section considers the implications of this heterogeneity for notions of hierarchy and harmony as applied to groups in Japanese society.

Nakane (1970) has argued that heterogeneity is characteristic of groups in Japan, and that in order to unify such groups, the members of which have

[5]The only misdemeanours really taken seriously are stealing from the company, or, in the case of older married men, having an affair with a member of staff. Both of these are causes for dismissal, but they are rare, or - at any rate - rarely discovered.

few or no common attributes[6] to bind them together, an "emotional" sense of "group consciousness" is encouraged (Nakane 1970: 10). She further argues that in the absence of "horizontal" ties of the type that link people with the same attributes, groups in Japan tend to be characterised by hierarchical, "vertical" interpersonal relations.[7] How far does this view of Japanese social groups as characterised by an emotional sense of group consciousness and bound together by vertical relations between their members, describe the Futajimaya case?

To take the question of "vertical" relations first, the problem, in the Futajimaya context, with characterising a relationship between two employees as vertical, is that there are a number of criteria according to which individuals may be ranked, and these frequently overlap and even contradict each other. The main criteria for ranking are: position within the company (for example, section chief or ordinary employee); employment status (especially, *seishain* or part-timer); level of education (university or high school graduate); length of service; age; and gender. The latter two are not officially criteria of ranking, but are important on an unofficial level. For example, gender is officially subsumed, as is often the case in Japan, in the category level of education - almost all the university graduates are men, and most of the high school graduates are women. However, for those whose gender and level of education are not congruent, gender can be seen to play an important role, with male high school graduates encouraged to take on more responsibilities than is the case for their female counterparts, while conversely the only female

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[6]"Attribute" in Nakane's model refers to personal qualities both inborn (such as gender, or caste in India) and acquired (for example position within company) (Nakane 1970).

[7]"If we postulate a social group embracing members with various different attributes, the method of tying together the constituent members will be based on the vertical relation" (Nakane 1970:24).

graduate whom I met in the course of my fieldwork was treated in apparently identical fashion to the female high school graduates.

It is this type of lack of congruence between principles of ranking that both necessitates further explanation and provides a way in to understanding the internal dynamics of the sections and of the company as a whole. For example, how would we characterise the relationship between a *pāto* in her fifties with fifteen years experience and a *seishain* with one year's experience? Or the same *pāto* with a female section chief, whom she had trained ten years previously? Or a female section chief, and high school graduate, with a male university graduate, notionally placed under her supervision? All these relationships are potentially highly ambiguous, and all are cases I encountered in my fieldwork. Nor are they unusual - in the case of *pāto-seishain* relationships in particular, the ranking criteria of age and length of service on the one hand, and employment status on the other are frequently, even generally, at odds. It is no coincidence that this relationship is the one most frequently referred to as problematic, both by senior management and by the employees involved. In the following sections of this chapter, two of the most frequent types of conflict between different principles of ranking are explored with reference to actual examples at the Hatakeda branch: firstly where ranking by gender is in conflict with formal status ranking; and secondly where employment status is in conflict with ranking by age and length of service.

9.4 Gender and Authority: problems on the first floor of the Hatakeda branch

Two of the main protagonists in this account have already been introduced. Mr Kimura, described in Chapter Eight, worked on the first floor of the Hatakeda branch, in the shoe department. The section chief of this

department was Mrs Arakawa, introduced in Chapter Seven. To recap briefly, Mrs Arakawa was a well-liked and outgoing member of staff, married to another Futajimaya employee who worked in the head office. A high school graduate from a farming family in Kyūshū, she had joined the company at the age of eighteen, and had, at the time of my fieldwork, spent fourteen years at the Hatakeda branch, reaching the grade of section chief seven years previously.

The only other section chief on this floor was Miss Nishiguchi in the haberdashery section, a good friend of Mrs Arakawa, but some four years younger and still unmarried. The other two sections on the floor were, in practical terms, run by experienced *pāto*, who received neither extra pay nor higher status in recognition of the responsibilities they assumed. Of the other *seishain* on the first floor, four were women, one of whom had joined in 1990, with the other three (one of whom was a University graduate) all new entrants in 1991. Mr Kimura, who had also joined in 1990, and was a university graduate, was therefore the only male full-time employee on the floor, with the exception of the floor manager, Mr Tanaka.

Mr Tanaka took a fairly relaxed attitude to his job, intervening very little in the day-to-day running of the floor, to the chagrin of some of the employees, who would have liked to see him take a more active role, for example to reallocate staff between sections in periods when one section was particularly busy while another had little to do, or to intervene with the buyers on occasions when sections felt that they were being given inappropriate or poor quality goods to sell. Such problems were taken seriously by staff owing to the pressure of sales targets, and were difficult to resolve in the case of the two sections without official section chiefs, as nobody had the formal authority to deal with this sort of issue.

Mr Tanaka often seemed distracted when these sorts of problems were brought to his attention, and to compound the frustrations of the part-time staff on the floor, he was not infrequently absent, taking extra leave in addition to his allocated two days a week. I eventually discovered that Mr Tanaka had a chronically ill daughter, and his absences were often in order to accompany her to hospital. He had opted out of the standard male career ladder of being a national employee, subject to transfer anywhere in Japan in order to be close to his family, and to help care for his daughter.

However, despite the fact that he had not himself followed the normative path for male employees, Mr Tanaka had firm views on gender roles in the workplace. Although as described above in Chapter Eight, Mr Kimura was a timid and generally unenthusiastic and ineffectual employee, from Mr Tanaka's point of view he was destined for a managerial position because of his gender. Mr Tanaka was aware of Mr Kimura's poor ability to communicate with other staff, and even on one occasion expressed his frustration with Mr Kimura to me. My notes record:

> Mr Tanaka expressed concern to me about Mr Kimura, saying that he would like to feel that other employees could turn to Mr Kimura with any problems or queries when he, Mr Tanaka was absent. This surprised me, as in the formal hierarchy Mrs Arakawa and Miss Nishiguchi were the next step down from Mr Tanaka, and I would have expected them, rather than the inexperienced Mr Kimura, to be called on in the manager's absence. I said this to Mr Tanaka, but he replied that "it's because Kimura is a man..."

Probing indirectly to discover what Mrs Arakawa felt about this situation, since Kimura was, notionally, her subordinate, I was surprised to find a total lack of resentment. From Mrs Arakawa's point of view, it was perfectly normal to promote men over the heads of women with greater experience. She noted that when the section chief system was first

introduced all the men in her intake were made promoted to this rank first, followed by the women. She described this as "natural". It may be relevant to note here that Mrs Arakawa came from a rural area of Kyūshū, a part of Japan renowned for the clear differentiation between male and female roles, and for a kind of male gender model thought of as strong and dominant - generally referred to as *Kyūshū danji*, literally, Kyūshū man. Mrs Arakawa may, therefore, have been predisposed to see male and female roles in all spheres of life as being quite separate, with positions of leadership falling to men.

Miss Nishiguchi, the other section chief, a dynamic and very efficient woman, also appeared to take it for granted that male employees would be given greater responsibilities than women, and promoted to a higher rank. She pointed out in this connection the difficulty for a young woman such as herself to give orders to the *pāto*, who were notionally subordinates, but in fact much older than she was. Orders received from men would, on the other hand, be much more likely to be followed. She also offered the opinion that men were more likely to be able to pass the necessary exams to reach the higher levels of the company, owing to their superior education.[8]

In general terms then, masculinity was seen as conferring automatic authority. Where women were placed in positions directly superior to men, they were often seen as caretaker positions, training new male employees up to a level where they would be able to take over. In most cases, this would be likely to happen fairly smoothly, as women with the position of

[8]From this perspective, the different career paths of men and women owed more to differences in level of education than to any notion of intrinsic differences between the two, an idea that reflects the official company line on this question. However, the principle of sorting employees according to educational level tends in practice to follow gender lines, as explained in Chapter Three, section 3.4.

section chief would mostly be reaching the end of their careers within the company, although the case of Mrs Arakawa as described in Chapter Seven suggests that for older women who have held this position for some time there may be considerable pressure brought on the woman to resign.

Within this frame, criticisms of male staff, by either male or female employees, tended to be couched in terms of their failure to exercise the authority expected of them, as can be seen in the cases of both Mr Tanaka and Mr Kimura. For female staff the position was different. Divided into two categories, the *pāto*, who were almost all senior to the *seishain* in terms of age, and many of whom were also senior in terms of experience; and the *seishain* who, although younger and often less experienced, were senior in terms of formal rank; the issue as to who had authority over whom was highly ambiguous, as will be explored further below.

9.5 Generation versus formal ranking: ambiguities in the female workforce

The female *seishain-pāto* relationship was probably the most apt to be problematic of all the different employee relationships within the company. Both female, both low status, both thought of as lacking a long-term commitment to the company, these two categories of employee were differentiated by age, pay, and employment status. Although generally twenty years or so younger than the *pāto*, the *seishain* received a higher salary,[9] and were notionally senior in the company hierarchy. This was despite the fact that many *pāto* could boast far longer terms of service

[9]The rate for a new *pāto* working a twenty five hour week worked out at about sixty percent of the starting salary for female high school graduate *seishain* working a thirty five hour week. That is, they received sixty percent of the salary for doing seventy percent of the hours. Although this discrepancy does not seem huge, it should be borne in mind that *pāto* paid at this rate did not receive the twice yearly bonuses received by the *seishain*, nor were they eligible for paid holidays or sick leave. Furthermore, *seishain* received substantially higher increases in pay than did the *pato* as their length of service increased, so for the longer serving employees the gap between the two widened considerably.

within Futajimaya. Also, the *seishain* had job security and could look forward to promotion to the rank of section chief if they remained with the company long enough, a position beyond the reach of the *pāto.*[10]

These differences were commented on as unfair, and resented by many *pāto,* who compared themselves directly with the female *seishain* in a way that neither group did with the male *seishain.* However, there was no official forum in which they could air their grievances, since, as noted in Chapter Three, company union membership was restricted to *seishain* and a very small subdivision of the *pāto,* the *teijishain.* One *pāto* told me that a group of them had got together a few years previously, and tried to set up a special union for part-timers, but that this had been blocked by the company, and an excuse subsequently found to dismiss the ringleaders. Since then, no-one had dared to try again. She voiced the opinion that the company took advantage of the *pāto* by paying them low wages, and it was this that enabled the company to make high profits. (This interpretation was backed up, indirectly, by my conversations with an executive at another leading chain store, who said that his company was trying to increase the proportion of part-time staff in order to improve profitability.) She also said that the company justified this by categorising *pāto* as housewives who worked for pin-money - they therefore did not need to pay them the same level of wage that they paid to *seishain.* This made her most indignant, as she said that wages should be calculated on the basis of work done, not on the recipient's family situation.

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[10]During my fieldwork, I only encountered one exception to this rule limiting eligibility for the post of section chief to *seishain,* the case of Mrs Matsumoto in the Osaka branch, who was asked to become section chief while she was still a *pāto.* Her acceptance of this position did, however, involve changing to the status of *seishain.* It seems, though, that this instance was very unusual. A detailed account of Mrs Matsumoto's career is given in Chapter Seven.

Most *pāto* , however, were not so articulate in their criticisms of the company, saying that the differences in wages and promotion prospects between themselves and the female *seishain* were unfair, but unavoidable, and not specific to Futajimaya. The reaction of Mrs Sato, the senior *pāto* in the section where I worked, was fairly typical in this respect - she simply shrugged her shoulders when asked about this point, saying, "It's like that in all Japanese companies. It can't be helped." This view was shared, to some extent, by company union officials. When I asked the deputy leader of the company union why they did not do more for the part-time employees, he responded that this was not a problem Futajimaya could tackle on its own, as the treatment of part-timers was fairly standard in all chain stores. For one chain store unilaterally to improve the wages of its part-timers would therefore increase costs and decrease profitability relative to the store's competitors. That was something no store could afford to do on its own, so it would have to be an industry-wide initiative. Such initiatives were difficult to realise because no industry-wide union existed, although discussions did take place among the various company unions in the sector. However, he did point out that Futajimaya had recently admitted the *teijishain* to the company union, and said that this was highly unusual in the retail sector, and showed that the union was doing what it could for the part-time employees.

In any event, deprived of the means to complain directly to management, and, in many cases, accepting the status quo as inevitable, and beyond management's control, the resentment of the *pāto* often focussed itself on the young women *seishain*.[11] This led, in some cases, to something akin to bullying, a problem of which company management was well aware, and

[11] Fellow *pāto* could also, on occasion be the target, as the case of Mrs Morinaga and Mrs Sato discussed below illustrates.

warned new trainees about during the initial training course. But more often, the resentment surfaced in muttered, and indirect, complaints to other *pāto*, along the lines of: "This cleaning work is hard on people my age, you have to bend down all the time. It would be better if the younger people did it..." Or,

> You spend so much time teaching them how to do the job, and they're just about learning to do it properly when they leave, and you have to start all over again with a new one. They make some excuse like 'my parents are ill', but I don't believe it, leaving your job because your husband or your children are ill is one thing, but your parents?

Or,

> The trouble is they're so young, they can't cope with human relations (*ningen kankei*). If somebody says something that upsets me, I just control myself and carry on. That one who left, she couldn't do that.

The implication behind all these remarks is that the young women *seishain* are in some sense immature and irresponsible, unable to do their jobs effectively, and in the end create more work for the *pāto*, for example by leaving after a short length of time, and thus obliging the *pāto* to train yet another new person. Further evidence of the prevalence of this view can be drawn from the company union survey, in which 34 per cent of the *teijishain* said they felt that *pāto* work more conscientiously than do the female *seishain*. 20.1 per cent also complained that not enough respect is shown in the workplace for older people.

This attitude among the part-timers made it quite difficult for younger *seishain* appointed as section managers to exercise authority over them. The *seishain* were very conscious of this, and most said they felt that the only way that a woman could be effective in the still higher rank of floor manager would be if she were considerably older than the *seishain* average - at least in her forties - so that the part-timers would be more inclined to defer to her. This was indeed the case of the only woman floor

manager at the branch, Miss Ushijima, who has been described in Chapter Seven. This in itself acted as a deterrent to the young female *seishain* from aspiring to promotion beyond section chief, as they would have to wait over twenty years before, in their terms, such a promotion would become a realistic possibility.

In general terms, a distinct wariness was shown by many young women *seishain* of the *pāto* with whom they worked, a wariness that served the company well in that it acted as a constraint, tending to make the *seishain* work harder for fear of criticism from the *pāto*. An example can be drawn from the hosiery section of Futajimaya, which comprised one *teijishain* in her fifties with fifteen years experience, Mrs Sato; two *pāto*, Mrs Morinaga, who was in her forties, and Mrs Suzuki, who was in her thirties; me and one *seishain*, Miss Kojima, already discussed in Chapter Seven, who was nineteen years old when I joined, and had a little over one year's experience with the company. Mrs Sato acted as the unofficial section head, and had trained all of the other members of the section at various times, while Mrs Morinaga was the next most senior in terms of length of service (five years) and deputed for Mrs Sato when necessary in most of the section, though she always steered clear of that part of the section allocated to Miss Kojima.

Generally, work within the section proceeded fairly smoothly, with Miss Kojima getting on with the work in her part of the section and taking her turns on the cash register with no apparent ill-will, and minimal chatting with other staff. She seemed to form rather a separate unit, allocated to the children's part of the section, while the *pāto* all worked together on the adult part. As the floating *arubaito*, I was sometimes sent off to help her, but otherwise anything to do with her area was regarded as her

responsibility, no-one offered to help her, nor did she offer to help in the rest of the section.

The working timetable was generally arranged so that either Mrs Sato or Mrs Morinaga was always present, but on one particular day both were absent, and a striking change was immediately evident in Miss Kojima. She took far longer than usual to get going with her work, looked sulky, and complained about how *kitsui* (exhausting) the work she had to do that day was. As we were doing the work (repricing) together, I suggested to her that having done a certain amount of it we leave the rest for another day. At this, Miss Kojima rounded on me, and said it was alright for me, I could leave it, and no-one would say anything, but if she didn't do it all she would get into trouble with Mrs Sato and Mrs Morinaga, when they returned the next day. Despite this comment, she took advantage of various excuses to absent herself from the section for extended periods, and continued to work at a snail's pace for the rest of the day, before reverting to her normal behaviour the following day, when Mrs Sato and Mrs Morinaga were also back at work.

I found this conversation interesting because Mrs Morinaga had no authority of any kind over Miss Kojima, and Mrs Sato's authority within the section was highly informal, and derived from the fact that after fifteen years she knew her way around better than anyone else, rather than from her formal status. In fact, in terms of formal status, Miss Kojima, as the only *seishain*, enjoyed higher status, and also a higher salary, than anyone else in the section. However, this evidently did not prevent her from feeling that she could not slack off when Mrs Sato or Mrs Morinaga were present, much as she might have wished to do so.

If anxiety over the reactions of the *pāto* working in the same section acted as a constraint on the *seishain*, what of the *pāto* themselves? How did they feel about their work, and what incentives did they have to work hard given a system which gave them no hope of promotion or significant pay increase? For this group of employees, a number of factors complicated workplace relations, not least of which was the absence of job security.[12] This tended to act as an incentive to work as hard as possible for fear of losing one's job, and also as a goad to resentment of anyone in the section, including other *pāto*, who was seen as not pulling her weight. The problem here was that performance was judged not on an individual but on a section by section basis, with sales results of each section regularly announced in morning meetings, and compared both with other sections on the same floor and with the same section in other branches of the company. Although, as pointed out above, the performance of the section would have no effect on the wages of the individual *pāto* , and she was not in any case eligible for promotion, if the section performed badly over an extended period of time the floor space allocated to it might be reduced, with consequent lay-offs. These would inevitably affect the part-timers, who would be the first to be discharged. For this reason, next to the section chiefs, the *pāto* tended to be the most anxious for their own section to perform well, and were correspondingly vigilant towards their fellow section-members.

Furthermore, the *pāto* as a group were far from being homogeneous. They varied in age from about thirty to late fifties, with a correspondingly wide

[12]Following standard practice in Japanese companies, job security was not guaranteed for any of the categories of part-timer. In times of labour shortage, such as when I undertook my fieldwork, their position was fairly secure, at Futajimaya at least, with the company even offering transfers to *pāto* and, to a lesser extent, *arubaito*, if their branch of the chain was forced to close. However, there was no assurance that this treatment would continue if the financial position of the chain were to deteriorate, or labour market conditions were to change, a fact of which the *pāto* were well aware.

range of family circumstances. Although all those I encountered were married with children, the older ones' children were already grown, with children of their own, and their domestic duties were hence less onerous, freeing them to dedicate more time to the company, for example by working on Sundays. The older *pāto* were also much less able to change jobs than were their younger counterparts, as female employees over fifty are not much in demand in Japan, and consequently experienced greater pressure to perform at Futajimaya, as losing the job they held there might mean losing their place in the workforce altogether. One result of this was that the commitment to the company and the degree of effective job mobility varied a great deal within the category of *pāto*, although their wages and employment conditions did not vary significantly. This was seen as another case of unfairness on the part of management by many *pāto*, along with the preferential treatment received by female *seishain*, and was a source of resentment. Mrs Morinaga in the hosiery section commented:

> In this place, it doesn't make any difference if you work hard or not. There's no recognition for hard work, everyone is paid the same. And often they ask us to do too much. Sometimes I get really fed up and I want to stop.

Mrs Morinaga also said that she regularly went through ads for part-time workers, looking for something better. The option of changing jobs was still open to her, although becoming more difficult as she was in her mid-forties. But her situation was still relatively less constrained than that of her colleague and immediate senior in the section, Mrs Sato.

Mrs Sato made it clear that she did not continue to work out of any great love for the job per se, simply from necessity. At fifty-five, she was anxious about her future, particularly as her husband was unwell (he was hospitalised for a time while I was working at Futajimaya), her son was as yet unmarried (weddings are very costly in Japan, to both families

involved), and she herself was very close to the official retirement age. And she felt she had little choice but to continue with Futajimaya, where she had been for the past fifteen years.

> I'm not qualified for anything, and I'm not so young. And I don't want to travel. Futajimaya is convenient, I can come here by bicycle. If I worked somewhere else, even if they paid me a better hourly rate, if you consider travelling time and fares it wouldn't be so good. And this is a good place to work if you're a housewife - you have to go out anyway to shop, so you can just pop into the food hall downstairs before you go home, which is really handy, don't you think?
>
> If I had some kind of qualification, I could do something else - if I had a driving license for example, I could do delivery work, or if I had computer or word-processor training...But I don't have any qualifications.

Mrs Sato felt that she worked very hard for little recognition, and that her job was made harder owing to the absences of other staff. She complained particularly bitterly about Mrs Morinaga, who took her day off on delivery day, leaving the rest of the section to unload and shelve the deliveries without her. On occasion, this meant that Mrs Sato had to do the job entirely by herself, as the third *pāto* on the section, Mrs Suzuki, and I both had young children, which inevitably meant periodic absences from work owing to illnesses or school events, and the *seishain* on the section, Miss Kojima, was sometimes absent for one day conferences or training programmes. Fortunately for us, our reasons for absence were regarded by Mrs Sato as valid, but she made no excuses for Mrs Morinaga, whose absences she appeared to attribute to sheer wilful selfishness, as Mrs Morinaga, in her forties, was past the age where she could cite family obligations as an excuse. Mrs Sato's feelings towards Mrs Morinaga reached a nadir when the latter absented herself for two weeks to go on holiday in Greece with her husband.

Despite all this, and her frequent criticisms of both the floor manager, of whom she spoke with undisguised contempt, and the buyer, who annoyed

her by appearing to ignore her suggestions about new stock for the section, Mrs Sato was anxious for the section to perform well, and for her own hard work to be noticed. She explained:

> The retirement age for *pāto* is fifty-seven. It's gone up, it used to be fifty-five. And for *seishain* it's sixty now. But sometimes they let you continue as an *arubaito*. But the senior people keep an eye on you, they know if you are working hard or not. and if you aren't, when you ask to continue they won't let you. Also, you have to watch the sales for your section, they're compared with sales for the same sections in all the other branches.

Returning to the relationship between Mrs Morinaga and Mrs Sato, the two were on far from cordial terms, despite their apparent similarities in generation, gender, and employment status, and the fact that they had worked closely together for the past five years. To an extent, this can be attributed to the difference in potential mobility between the two women, but I would argue that the inherent tensions in belonging to the same section and therefore being interdependent in terms of assessment by superiors and job security also play an important role. During the year I spent at Futajimaya, I observed a number of warm friendships between *pāto*, but never between *pāto* employed in the same section, and it therefore seems to me that membership of the same section often acts as an obstacle to forming friendly relationships, whatever the image projected for outsiders may be.

9.6 Vertical Relations? A reassessment

Few relationships in Futajimaya could thus be categorised as unambiguously vertical, since, as we have seen above, in many relationships different criteria of ranking cross-cut each other, most notably age, gender, and employment status. Relationships which could be characterised as vertical tend, therefore, mainly to emerge within a category of employee united by employment status, gender, and generation. The problem here is that few employees in any given section

belong to the same category, so that within the section relations between employees are often ambiguous.

This pattern also has implications for Nakane's view of conflict in Japan as related to factionalism, and segmentation of groups along vertical lines of people owing allegiance to particular seniors, or *senpai* (Nakane 1970). The *senpai-kohai* (senior-junior) links on which she lays so much stress are of limited relevance within the sections that form the basic work units in Futajimaya as Japanese usage is to restrict the use of this term to fellow *seishain* of the same gender who are also not too distant in terms of generation and rank. Thus, relations among female *seishain* on the one hand and among male *seishain* on the other could be referred to as *senpai-kohai*, but not relations involving part-timers, or cross-gender relations. Given the scattered distribution of *seishain* throughout the various sections of the company, *senpai-kohai* relations therefore tended to act as an overarching, unifying network within the company, rather than as a cause of segmentation or factionalism. Furthermore, the use of the term *senpai* did not always imply a close relationship, rather a recognition of the fact that the employee referred to was from an earlier intake. Although close *senpai-kohai* relations did develop, this would as often as not be due to patterns of socialising and residence rather than relations at work.

There was also a difference between the male and female *senpai-kohai* networks regarding the importance attached to these relations, and the extent to which they acted as the predominant organisational principle. Women *seishain* were likely to have friends from the same intake working at the same branch, and living in the same dormitory, at least for the first few years of their employment. Relations between such *dōkisei* (people of

the same level)[13] were often close, and would persist even after one or more had left the branch. These employees did also form *senpai-kohai* relationships, but usually on the basis of common interests with women from a previous intake living in the same dormitory. In contrast to the young male *seishain*, who all tended to congregate in a single group at company social events, the female *seishain* would break up into small cliques, with some unfortunates always tending to be left out and ignored. Within these cliques, a mixture of *senpai-kohai* and *dōkisei* relations would generally exist, but with no noticeable difference in behaviour between *senpai* and *kohai* and among *dōkisei*, the difference being rather one of terminology when referring to other members of the clique. For this reason, I think that even within *seishain* networks the term "vertical" should be used with caution to characterise relationships.

For the male employees, on the other hand, *senpai-kohai* relations were important because there were so few young men working in the branch that they would invariably all congregate together at company social events. They also lived in the same dormitory, and would therefore end up spending a great deal of time together outside work, but very little at work, where they were dispersed throughout the store. Also, in any given intake only one or two young men would enter the same branch, so within the branch few, if any, of the relationships between male employees were between individuals of equivalent status.

For the older male employees, the situation was somewhat different again, as these senior men were regularly rotated between branches, and might not be in one branch long enough to develop close ties with other male

[13]This is the analogous term in the company context to the term dōkyūsei, used of classmates (see Chapter Five).

staff. Difficulties in establishing close personal connections were accentuated by the fact that at the level of floor manager and above the staff did not reside in company dormitories, but in their own private accommodation, or, more rarely, in company housing. They therefore did not spend as much time outside work with branch colleagues as was the case for more junior male staff. Relations among older male managers were, for these reasons, highly variable, and in many cases were limited to a formal hierarchical relationship with little personal involvement. For these men, *senpai-kohai* relationships or *dōkisei* relationships formed at an earlier stage in their career, with men who were now employed in other branches, were likely to be the focus of friendships. The off-duty socialising with other male employees at the same branch was seen as falling into the category of *tsukiai* - that is, obligatory work-related socialising, rather than signifying a more personal connection. Such social relations might be terminated rather abruptly if the position in the company of the individuals involved changed, as can be seen from the example of Mr Kohama given in Chapter Eight, where, after being transferred out of the branch of which he had been manager to a purely honorific position, he found himself shunned at company social events.

To summarise: it would seem that in the Futajimaya case, where close *senpai-kohai* links did exist, these were not necessarily congruent with formal hierarchies within branches, and, rather than leading to segmentation along the lines suggested by Nakane, they served as unifying networks, not only at the branch, but also at a company-wide level. Furthermore, it would be easy to overstate the importance of senior-junior networks, since *dōkisei* networks, composed of men who joined the company at the same time, also existed. Many *dōkisei* would, however, simply lose touch with each other after the initial training course, unless

they were also bound by an additional common factor, such as graduating from the same university. To this extent, some *gakubatsu*, or school cliques, also appeared to exist within Futajimaya, although such cliques were officially frowned on.

So, even where the *seishain* are concerned, rather than characterising the Futajimaya chain as a pyramid-like organisation, I see it as a constellation of overlapping networks and cliques, some of which are organised hierarchically, and some not. For male employees in particular, it is possible to be a member of a number of different networks at the same time, and these networks form vital channels of communication between the different parts of the company. For example, the branch manager of Hatakeda, who initially acted as my patron within the company, had been working in Osaka prior to the Hatakeda posting, and lacked a network in the Kanto area. He was also one of the few men of his rank not to have graduated from a four-year university, and was therefore also unable to appeal to a school clique. For these reasons, when I wished to participate in the training programme for new entrants, Mr Kohama gave his approval, but told me that I would have to arrange this through my floor manager, Mr Tanaka. Mr Tanaka, it transpired, had a *dōkisei* who was highly placed in the training department. This *dōkisei* was also a graduate of the same university as Mr Tanaka, and their wives, also ex-Futajimaya employees, were close friends.[14] I found that thenceforward any queries about training were much better dealt with through Mr Tanaka rather than through Mr Kohama, even though the latter was formally senior in the company hierarchy. This case was quite typical in that I found throughout my fieldwork that the best way to set up an interview or obtain certain

[14]The importance of relationships among wives of businessmen in the upper echelons of the business world has been commented on by Hamabata (1990).

information was to find out who, of the employees I knew and was on good terms with, was plugged into the relevant network, and then set up the connection through that employee, irrespective of his or her position in the formal hierarchy.

This pattern of networks and cliques is reproduced among the part-timers, and again "vertical" links are not necessarily the ones that count. In fact, generation seemed very important here, with the younger *arubaito* gravitating towards the younger *seishain*, while the *pāto* also tended to prefer the company of other women of a similar age, generally other *pāto*, but sometimes also *seishain*. Interests and general personal style were also important here, one example of this being a highly visible, though small, group of *pāto* and one *seishain* around thirty, some of them with small children, who tended to wear heavy make-up and smoked cigarettes. These women did not get on particularly well with their older, more conventional, colleagues, and complained of being caught in the middle between the young *seishain* and the older *pāto*. On their side, most of the older *pāto* made no secret of their disapproval of mothers with pre-kindergarten age children who went out to work, leaving their children in day-care centres. Cigarette smoking by women, and the wearing of heavy make-up, are also widely regarded in Japan as indicative of a degree of moral laxity.

Despite the tendency to form generation and interest-based groups, and the frequent tensions between *pāto* working in the same section noted above, there was also, perhaps surprisingly, a degree of section-based factionalism among the *pāto*. For example, in the hosiery section Mrs Sato, although critical of her fellow *pāto* Mrs Morinaga in the same section, reserved her most vitriolic comments for the *pāto* working in the service

section. She would get particularly annoyed with the latter on delivery days, when hosiery would be almost submerged by a deluge of cardboard boxes to be unpacked and shelved. On these days she would regularly point out to me that the *pāto* in the service section (which sold cinema and theatre tickets, and ran a delivery and postal service) were sitting behind their counter "doing nothing". Why, demanded Mrs Sato, could one of them not come over and help us, seeing as we were clearly rushed off our feet?

In her calmer moments though, Mrs Sato furnished the explanation herself. Each section, as noted above, has its own sales targets, and failure or success in achieving these reflects on all members of the section. On the other hand, helping members of other sections earns one no credit whatsoever. Furthermore, sections of the same floor were in competition with each other as to who could achieve the best sales for the month. It would seem to me that in this context, there are, if anything, positive disincentives to helping out in other sections, and also a certain rivalry and inter-personal tension between the sections is encouraged. This is particularly the case for the older *pāto*, who may feel that their future job security depends on their section's performance. Perhaps for this reason, friendships between *pāto* would often span not only different sections, but different floors, where they were not in competition with each other and relations could, therefore, be more relaxed. For *seishain*, on the other hand, job security was not an issue, and I was not aware of any inter-sectional animosity amongst this category of employee.

Inter-sectional relations also had another side: the maintenance of an external face of section harmony. For work purposes at least, the section was the primary grouping, and followed the strong social norm that conflict should not be publicly displayed to non-group members (though

private moaning to close friends is another matter). In the material presented above, all my examples of intra-sectional problems are drawn from the same section - hosiery, where I was employed. I do not believe, however, that this was because the hosiery section was exceptionally conflict-ridden, but rather because, as an insider of this particular group, it was acceptable for the group members to voice their grumbles to me, whereas it would not have been to do so to an outsider. Here then we are drawn into the difference between inside and outside oriented discourses, and the thorny area of conflict and harmony.

9.7 Harmony and Conflict: outsider and insider discourses

In enquiring why so much emphasis is placed on harmony in much of the writing done about Japanese companies, it may be illuminating to contrast once more two forms of discourse concerning company life: the official company discourse, appropriated by many sociologists, and that of popular culture. In the former, harmony is stressed: this is the world of Pascale and Athos (1981), and of numerous statements by high-ranking company officials, for example the speech given by the managing director of Futajimaya at the entrance ceremony, where he told us that happiness comes from *minami* - a word play indicating everyone working together.[15] In the latter, inter-employee relationships, interestingly, often those superior-inferior relationships portrayed as harmonious in the official discourse, are portrayed as replete with tension and sometimes open conflict. Clark (1979: 203-4) cites the example of the caricaturised demon boss in Japanese manga , and similar images can be found in Japanese salaryman novels referred to in Chapter One.

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[15]See Chapter Five.

This is not to say that work-relations are always tense in Japan, but rather that there is considerable variation, and it is by no means safe to assume that harmony prevails simply because that is the "face" presented to outsiders. It is, in any case, a strong ethic in Japan that intra-group conflict should not be displayed to people outside the group, whether the group in question is the household or the work-group. Clark writes of the company where he conducted his research:

> There was frequently antipathy between a superior and a subordinate....There were fierce rivalries between men in the same standard ranks. Two sub-section heads, two department heads, even two directors were on such bad terms that they could hardly speak to each other. A common problem was that caused by an incompetent or, worse still, a lazy member of a work-group, who gave his fellows extra work, or let the side down in its dealings with other parts of the company.
>
> Problems similar to these arise in companies everywhere, but at Marumaru the need for ostensibly good human relations caused them to be expressed in oblique and even devious ways. People were reluctant to admit that there was any competition in their own part of the organization, even though in other, less happy sections men were indeed trying to surpass each other....
>
> The contrast between the superficial impression of determined amity and the underlying contention and resentment...was very great. By the time I left Marumaru, departments that had once seemed to me models of 'good human relations' had been revealed to be full of animosities and spites.
>
> (Clark 1979: 204-5)

Clark tells us that the underlying tension he observe was confined to the "immobile" employees in the company - that is, the older male *seishain* with little prospect of changing their employer, and argues that relations between immobile employees in a company are inherently likely to be more strained than those between mobile employees. He suggests this is partly because the former category do not have the option of leaving when human relations become difficult, and partly because of competition for a limited number of senior posts (Clark 1979:180-181). From my Futajimaya data, I would concur that long-term commitment to the company, whether

reflected in formal employment status or not, can certainly add to the tensions experienced by an individual employee, as we can see in Mrs Sato's case. However, in the Futajimaya case, as I have described, tension was also present in the work-relations of mobile employees. The explanation for this, in my view, is that a degree of tension is intrinsic to the work group, and derives partly from the heterogeneity of the individuals who compose it, and partly from the system of assessment on a group rather than an individual basis.

This method of group assessment is, of course, well known, and has been extensively commented on in analyses of the Japanese company. However, the usual, somewhat circular, argument is that assessment of this type fosters harmony in the group,because harmonious groups function effectively as work units, and Japanese work groups are governed by strong ideals of harmony. Actually, the way this argument is phrased ought to make us suspicious as it is classically functionalist, and tautological, chasing its own tail and ultimately lacking any explanatory power. The argument stands or falls on two main assumptions: firstly that harmonious inter-personal relations foster efficient performance at work, and secondly that stated ideals of harmony are an accurate representation of inter-personal work relations.

On the first count, I have tried to show that harmony is not a necessary ingredient for efficiency. Indeed, conflict and tension between employees may be greatly to the company's advantage in so far as this constitutes a system of informal sanctions against slacking off at work. Secondly, both my research and that of Clark tend to show that although Japanese social norms are that a harmonious face should be presented to outsiders, the

more one becomes accepted by a group as an insider, the more evident the rivalries and tensions within that group become.

It is revealing to note here that the greatest tensions I, as a female part-timer, observed, were among female employees, and were all relationships involving *pāto* - either with each other or with the younger female *seishain*. I remained blissfully unaware of any tensions that may have existed among *seishain*, more especially male *seishain*. Conversely, the problems Clark (1979:180-181) reports were all among male *seishain*, and he characterised the relations among female employees as "free and frank". I think it highly likely that these differences in our findings are influenced by our gender, and the fact that we were each insiders of a somewhat different group within the company. To each of us, therefore, our own group appeared conflict-ridden, and other groups relatively conflict free.

Should we then turn the prevailing wisdom on its head, and argue that work-groups foster tension and conflict because conflict functions to enhance efficiency at work, while harmony is merely a smoke-screen designed to preserve the face of the group? In addition to being unnecessarily Machiavellian, this argument is subject to precisely the same criticism as its predecessor: it is functionalist and circular. So how can we deal with the conundrum of conflict and harmony?

Perhaps one way forward would be to remember that conflict and harmony are not necessarily mutually exclusive, at least as far as inter-personal relationships are concerned. Most relationships have aspects of both, and move constantly between the relatively harmonious and the relatively conflict-laden. Secondly, if harmony is the prevailing value in the formal

tatemae discourse directed at outsiders, and this discourse is therefore but a partial representation of the complexities of workplace relations, the same is true of the conflict-orientated representation characteristic of insider discourse. Among insiders it is not felt necessary to emphasise how harmoniously the section works. A degree of harmony may be present, but it is taken for granted, that is, after all, how things are supposed to be, and there is no need to belabour the point. The interest lies in the way in which practice deviates from ideals rather than conforms to them, and it is this deviation that attracts attention within the group.

Finally, to introduce the notion of efficiency at work into the argument, as do Pascale and Athos (1981) among others, is to throw an unnecessary spanner in the works, and predispose one to a functional "explanation". This approach takes it as given that Japan is economically successful, therefore its companies are economically successful, therefore Japanese companies are efficient, therefore Japanese working practices must be efficient. The aim of the exercise then becomes to discover the reason for this efficiency, which is frequently located in "Japanese management", ergo, workplace relations.

On the other hand, if we accept that there is a wide variation in economic success and efficiency among Japanese companies, we are no longer tied to this sort of explanation, as there would then appear to be no one-to-one correlation between Japanese norms of workplace relations and company performance. We can instead talk about social norms and types of discourse surrounding relationships at work, and variations in levels of conflict and harmony which may or may not work in the company's best interests, and indeed may have quite unforseen consequences. This latter approach, as well as freeing us from the circularities of functionalism, introduces a

dynamism to relations within the company, and offers us a perspective from which to understand change.

Also, by shifting the focus to a discussion of rival discourses, we can again move away from the frame of the Japanese company, a frame that tends to stress the unique and peculiar character of this institution, and towards a wider view of discourses in Japanese society, in this case discourses of harmony and conflict. It is not only within the Japanese company that harmony is valued as a face to present to outsiders. The same is true of all Japanese social relationships, including families, schools, and social clubs.[16] Mothers, for example, may shout at or even slap their children inside the house, but will endeavour not to do so outside. Equally, although husbands and wives may row, they should never do so in public. There is a proverb, not unlike the English one about washing dirty linen in public, "Put a lid on stinky things".

Again, the uses of peer pressure, and assessment of the group rather than the individual are not limited to the company, but are used to great effect throughout the Japanese school system, from kindergarten onwards.[17] And again, the appearance of harmony within the group at school is valued, although competition between its members for ranking, good exam marks, and a place in a high ranking school/college/company at the next level of the system is inherent, at least from primary school onwards.

Here, as with the case of the company entrance ceremony, we are dealing with patterns of discourse that are very familiar to the Japanese

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[16]Conflict in a variety of arenas in Japanese society has been described in two collections of essays: that edited by Krauss Rohlen and Steinhoff (1984), and that edited by Eisenstadt and Ben Ari (1990).

[17]See Hendry 1986:143-148, for an account of the workings of peer pressure as a system of discipline in Japanese kindergartens.

participant, and which he or she can readily decode and participate in. And I would argue that the most useful role of the anthropologist in this context is therefore not to attempt to explain group organisation and relations in terms of functions, but in terms of discourses and systems of meaning. In Chapter Ten this theme of discourses of harmony and conflict is taken up in greater detail, with particular reference to group activities in the workplace, and socialising after hours.

Chapter Ten

Unity and fragmentation: group events within the company

In the preceding chapters a shift can be traced from discourses stressing the unity of the company and the common purpose and identity of company members, to a more fragmented view stressing the differences in individual agendas and relationships within the company, and the tensions and conflicts that can ensue from this fragmentation. It has also been argued that, far from being a pyramid-like structure composed of vertically linked segments, a number of different sorts of overlapping groups co-exist within the company, with generation, gender, and employment status all playing an important role in the positioning of an employee relative to his or her fellows.

In the picture presented of the company so far, discourses of corporate unity have largely been associated with occasions involving the presentation of the company to the outside world (potential new recruits, the general public) and to new company members through the initial training programme and the entry ceremony. However, it would be misleading to suggest that a clear dichotomy exists between one representation directed at outsiders stressing the unity of the group, and another privileged insider representation where group unity is revealed as an illusion. Although the various schisms within the company may be more evident to those employed by it, there is no shortage of occasions within the company itself where corporate membership is affirmed and celebrated. For those looking for confirmation of the primacy of "groupism" in Japanese organisations, on a superficial level at least examples are easy to find. In the workplace, numerous meetings are held at

all levels of the company, ranging from the morning meetings discussed in Chapter Seven to quality control circles,[1] which are discussed in greater detail below. Outside the workplace too, the company year is punctuated by social events organised for the employees: sports days, union festivals, and company trips.

In this chapter, examples of these group activities for insiders will be described, and the process of accommodation between corporate-centred discourses of unity and harmony, and discourses of conflict and fragmentation will be examined. As outlined above in Chapter One, Japanese companies have often been represented as characterised by a consensual style of management involving all employees, and by the tendency of the company to "envelop" the employee. This chapter will discuss the notions of corporate unity and consensus in the Futajimaya context, and will investigate further the dynamic of company-group-individual employee.

Since company-organised group activities in Futajimaya were extremely numerous it is impossible to detail all of them here. However, they can be broken down into a number of categories. Firstly, there were the formal meetings of staff members with the explicit primary purpose of conveying information about the company to the employees. Under this heading came the daily morning meetings described in Chapter Nine and the monthly meetings for all members of staff. Secondly, there were activities that might be described as "consultative", in that their expressed purpose was to gather employees' opinions, such as the quality control circles, described in greater detail below. Thirdly, there were social occasions not directly

[1]Quality control circles, described in more detail below, are a kind of small group activity that have become associated with close employee involvement with the company and a "Japanese" style of management.

connected with work, organised outside working hours. These included branch based events, such as welcome or leaving parties, company trips, and the cherry blossom viewing party in the spring; and company-wide events such as the sports day or the company union festival. Many of these were organised by the company union, and indeed the staging of such events was seen by the union officials as one of their primary responsibilities, as discussed further below. A fourth category of group event stands somewhat apart from the rest in so far as it spanned both company employees and non-employees. Into this category fall the special invitation-only luxury goods sales that were staged periodically at a top-class hotel, and the summer dance festival in which all major local companies as well as schools and other organisations fielded a dance team. In this chapter, examples of all these types of group activities are considered.

10.1. Meetings

As is the case in most Japanese companies, the everyday running of Futajimaya was punctuated by a great number of meetings - the daily morning meetings described in Chapter Nine; monthly meetings for *seishain* and for part-timers (held separately); "With Circle"meetings;[2] section chief meetings; managers' meetings; trainers' meetings; trainees' meetings - the list could be extended almost indefinitely. Although the precise content of these meetings varied widely, they can be regarded as falling into two basic categories: lecture-style meetings, in which a largely mute audience were addressed by one, or a succession of speakers; and meetings that were explicitly consultative in aim, demanding the participation of all those attending. The morning meetings and the

[2] Futajimaya's equivalent of quality control circles, to which the English name "With Circle" was given.

monthly staff meetings are examples of the former type, while the "With Circle" meetings provide perhaps the best example of the latter type, and are considered separately below.

Lecture-style meetings - the monthly staff meeting

The monthly meetings were held before work on the first Sunday of every month for the *seishain*, and during working hours on the following Monday for the part-timers, many of whom took Sunday off. Whether for *seishain* or part-timers, these meetings were conducted by the branch manager, and followed a broadly similar pattern. Those attending would assemble in the staff canteen, in a relaxed and informal atmosphere, with generally quite a lot of chatting between friends as they waited for the branch manager to arrive and start the meeting. On his arrival, everyone rose to their feet, and, after the manager had greeted them, bowed their heads, and chorused *ohayō gozaimasu* (good morning). The meeting would then begin with the introduction of new branch members (either new entrants or newly transferred to the branch), and announcements of transfers away from the branch. Only the arrivals of *seishain* or *teijishain* [3] were noted in this way - the ordinary part-timers arrived and left again without the marker of an official announcement at a general staff meeting.[4] In the case of the *seishain* meetings, the new *seishain* would go to the front of the room to be introduced in person, while for the part-timers' meetings new *seishain* would be introduced simply by having their names read out, with only the *teijishain* introduced in person.

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[3] A special category of part-timer that could be described as "honorary company members". See Chapter Three, section 3.4 for a detailed explanation.

[4] The arrival and departure of ordinary part-timers was announced only at the daily morning meeting on their floor.

The second item on the agenda would generally be the announcement of results of campaigns conducted during the previous month The manager responsible for conducting the campaign would collate the results and then give his own view of the key points. Sometimes these campaigns appeared to be concerned to solicit the opinions of staff, for example one campaign, entitled TOUCH heart,[5] involved the distribution to all members of staff of forms on which they were invited to write down anything they felt was wrong with their section, and to suggest ways in which this could be improved. The forms were then collected by the floor managers, who added their comments before submitting them to the branch manager. They were all later displayed prominently on notice boards in the staff canteen. A wide range of categories of criticism were given on the form, including staff appearance and behaviour, type of goods stocked, appearance of the display units, and cleanliness. Although from the visiting anthropologist's perspective it would seem that not all these items were ones for which individual staff members could be held personally responsible, the forms were generally interpreted as inviting self criticism, and similar comments were repeated again and again - typically, "I do not smile enough at the customers, from now on I will try to always have a smiling face". Manager's comment "Please try to do so". In one monthly *seishain* meeting, the branch manager summed up the TOUCH heart campaign by saying that the point of the campaign was that employees should try and put themselves in the customer's position. He enlisted my help to quote the bible in English - "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", and told the assembled staff that this was the golden rule of Christianity, and also the purpose of TOUCH heart.

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[5] TOUCH heart was also the motto of the company (see Appendix One). The motto was in English, a not uncommon practice in Japan, conveying an international, modern, image, and also giving it an enigmatic quality that lent itself to elaborate exegesis.

Other campaigns had more tangible objectives, such as signing up as many customers as possible to the newly issued Futajimaya group store card, or keeping the store clean and tidy. For these campaigns small prizes were issued to individual or group winners, most often in the form of cash, although there were also non-cash prizes sometimes, usually consisting of luxury food items such as fresh fruit. Recipients of prizes would go to the front of the room to collect their prize from the manager, to the applause of those assembled.

After the distribution of prizes came the breakdown of the previous month's sales results, and the percentage of targets achieved. This was the part of the meeting to which most emphasis was given, with exhortations to the staff to try harder if sales figures failed to come up to expectations. Reminders of store rules would also be issued periodically, whenever the branch manager felt that employees were getting lax about, for example, personal appearance or chatting when they should be working. Finally, the manager moved on to announce the overall aims for the coming month, for example cleanliness, and associated campaigns, together with any forthcoming company social events. The meeting was concluded by a joint recitation of the five basic greetings, led by a representative of one floor, with the different floors taking it in turns to lead the greetings month by month.

As with the morning meetings discussed in Chapter Nine, the main explicit purpose of the monthly meetings was to maintain a flow of information from senior to junior levels of the company. Much of this information, for example that concerning special sales or other events to be held at the store, was repeated at monthly meeting, daily meetings, and in the monthly schedules of store events posted up outside the floor manager's office on

each floor. In this way, it became almost impossible for even the most inattentive employee to be uninformed about major forthcoming events. Consequently, central management were able to rely on employees at section level to take responsibility for matters such as ordering extra merchandise or organising special displays for occasions such as Mother's Day, or the beginning of the school year in April.

In this sense, the monthly meetings, like the daily *chōrei*, can be seen as part of the general dissemination of information within the company, a goal also pursued through the distribution of a plethora of company directives, schedules of coming events, reports, company magazines, and so on. This aspect of Japanese company life has been noted by Clark (1979:129), who also argues that "this generous flow of information" serves to boost employee morale and increase the individual employee's sense of involvement with the company .

The other explicit goal of the meetings was to encourage the employees to greater efforts, through pep talks, the discussion of campaigns concerning staff attitudes, and the announcement of competition results and distribution of prizes. There is an interesting shift here from an emphasis on the wider corporate body to the divisions within that body. Firstly, as far as competitions were concerned, although some were between individuals (such as that to sign up the most customers to the new store card), more often they were between floors or sections within floors. For the cleanness campaign, for example, prizes were awarded to the cleanest sections. Rivalry between different elements of the company - sections or floors, - was thus encouraged in the interests of improved overall performance. In this context, employees were encouraged to identify with their section or their floor rather than with the company as a whole.

However, in other contexts, notably the campaigns concerning staff attitudes, the focus shifted again to the individual and his or her personal contribution to the company.

Seen in this way, the monthly staff meetings underlined the formal divisions within the company: at the base the individual employee, who is a member of ever wider, more inclusive groups - the section, the floor, the branch, and ultimately the company as a whole. At each level rivalry exists between groups on the same level, but this is subsumed by and marshalled in support of the common interests of the larger group of which they are all part. Rather than conflict, it seems more apt here to speak of a controlled and amicable competitiveness.

From another perspective, however, these meetings conveyed a different message about group membership. Firstly, the very fact of attending one particular meeting and not another was an indicator of employee status, with the *seishain* attending one meeting on Sunday mornings before work, the *pāto* another held the following day during working hours, and the *arubaito* not required to attend any staff meetings at all. And while attendance was mandatory for the *seishain*, for the *pāto* it was entirely contingent on their work shifts - those who worked on Monday mornings attended, others were not required to. The reason given for the division of the meetings by status group was simply convenience - there were too many staff for all to fit into the canteen at the same time. Many *pāto* did not work on Sundays, while, conversely, the *seishain* generally took days off during the week, making it difficult to find a day convenient for everyone. The *arubaito*, for their part, were considered as temporary staff, performing only routine tasks under the instruction of other employees, so it was considered unnecessary to keep them informed about wider company

concerns. However, on occasions where it was deemed necessary, such as the periodic fire drills, all the staff were assembled in the store at one time and addressed as a body, through the simple expedient of using a venue other than the canteen. And I was told by one of the longer serving staff that some years previously there had indeed been joint meetings for all the staff.

In any case, whether by accident or design, the way in which the meetings were segregated underlined the distinction between the three status groups of employee, a message which was further reinforced by the practice of announcing arrivals, departures, and transfers of *seishain* and *teijishain* at the meetings, but not those of other categories of part-timer. The effect of this was that part-timers arrived and left relatively unnoticed other than by those working on the same floor of the store. It was quite possible, and often happened, that a part-timer would not be recognised by staff in different sections of the store when she went shopping there in her ordinary clothes. And as far as new *seishain* were concerned, they would be presented in person to all the other *seishain*, but only to the part-timers on the floor to which they had been assigned. Thus although a great deal of emphasis was laid on all the *seishain* being known to each other, it was not considered so important that they should be known to all the part-timers. Effectively, the part-timers' sphere of interest and personal connections within the company was limited to the floor on which she worked, while for the *seishain* the crucial group of which they acquired membership on entrance to the company was not the floor or the section, but the body of *seishain*, with links spreading throughout the branch and beyond.

In addition, the content of the *seishain* and part-timers' meetings, although broadly similar, was not always identical: items deemed of special concern to *seishain* would often simply be omitted from the part-timers' meetings. So, for example, before the new intake of *seishain* arrived, the existing *seishain* spent a part of their monthly meeting preparing caricatures of each of the newcomers, with the help of photos and other information, to hang on the walls of the staff section of the building. And, more importantly, prior to the launch of the With Circle campaign, the *seishain* used their monthly meetings to decide on the themes that the With Circles should tackle, a subject that was never broached with the part-timers, even though some of them were invited to participate in the campaign. Thus the separation of the two categories of employee in these meetings served to emphasise the distinction between them as full members of the company and those on the periphery, with the latter only selectively involved in company business.

The monthly meetings can thus be read as embodying a dual message: on the one hand they emphasise the formal structure of the company, with its vertical divisions of branches, floors, and sections, especially in the competitions and announcements of sales results. However, from the point of view of meeting organisation and attendance, the horizontal divisions of *seishain*, *pāto*, and *arubaito* are the crucial ones, with members of the same section attending different meetings, or not attending meetings at all depending on their status. And this difference in status also had an effect in filtering the amount of information and involvement deemed appropriate for the different categories of employee, with far greater involvement of the *seishain* than of the part-timers. This distinction between *seishain* and part-timers was also noticeable in other group

activities in Futajimaya, including the quality control circles, to which I now turn.

Consultative activities

The large number of meetings that take place in Japanese companies are often associated with a process of consultative decision making that involves all or most of the employees, and ensures a high degree of consensus among the work force when decisions are finally taken. However, in the Futajimaya case, even when the meeting concerned was consultative rather than lecture-like in style, there were widespread doubts among the lower level employees as to how seriously their suggestions were taken. There was also an informal consensus about subjects that were off-limits to employees making suggestions about improving corporate performance, the range of suggestions made being in practice limited to suggestions that seemed likely to be acceptable to senior management. As a very junior employee, the range of consultative meetings in which I was able to participate was strictly limited, the principal ones being the With Circle meetings. These are, however, a particularly interesting example, as they were Futajimaya's equivalent of the quality control circles for which Japanese companies have become famous.

Quality control circles were originally introduced in Japan under American influence in the early post war period. The promotion of statistical quality control by visiting US experts in the early 1950s was followed up by the insistence of Dr Juran, a quality control expert who visited Japan on a lecture tour in 1954, that quality control should be made

"an integral part of the management function and practiced throughout the firm" (Cole 1979:136). However, the US and Japanese interpretations of this notion differed radically: in the United States quality control was in practice entrusted to middle management, while in Japan ordinary employees were enlisted to form study groups called quality control circles, or QC circles. Although these circles have become most celebrated in the manufacturing industry, they exist in large companies across all sectors of the economy, and share common features wherever they are found.

Typically, QC circles have around ten members, and meet once or twice a month. Circle meetings are often held outside working hours, and mostly last for between thirty and sixty minutes, time that may or may not be remunerated.[6] The methodology used in the circles may include quite sophisticated statistical analysis, but perhaps the most salient feature is the emphasis on brainstorming and the eliciting of contributions from all members of the circle. The topics with which they may be concerned vary widely - anything that could be construed as effecting the performance of the company as a whole can be included, ranging from product quality to employee morale. However, it would seem that the majority of circle themes can be subsumed by the category of "themes ... directed towards the attainment of company policy, or key work unit matters" (Onglacto 1988:21).[7] Although this might appear to be an obvious point, it has important implications in so far as the QC circle is thus in the majority of cases a vehicle for the furthering of company policy, it is not an arena in which company policy can be challenged. Onglacto argues that "the QC circle serves as a useful mechanism in integrating employees in the

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[6] A 1972 survey found that nearly a third of the companies responding to the survey did not pay their employees for time spent in QC circles (Asian Productivity Organization 1972:14).

[7] Onglacto (1988) cites a survey conducted by the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers in 1983, which shows that such topics accounted for 85.6% of circle themes.

organizational base towards the attainment of organizational goals" (Onglacto 1988:21). However, this begs the question of how these goals are formulated, and by whom; and the degree to which they are shared by employees at different levels of the company. These points will be taken up in the Futajimaya case below.

As mentioned above, in Futajimaya, quality control circles, called "With Circles", were organised at irregular intervals as part of periodic "With Circle Campaigns". One such campaign took place in the spring of 1991, while I was doing my fieldwork. In the Hatakeda branch separate circles were formed on each floor, with eight to ten participants in each circle, each of whom was allocated a specific role. On the first floor, where I was employed, the leader of the circle was Mr Kimura, a relatively junior employee with only one year's experience, but, as a male, destined for a managerial role in the future.[8] Mrs Arakawa, one of the two section chiefs on the floor, was sub-leader, while the other section chief, Miss Nishiguchi, was "data chief". Miss Kojima, a woman *seishain* who had joined at the same time as Mr Kimura, was the secretary of the circle, and was responsible for taking notes. Mrs Sato, a senior part-timer, was charged with relaying information on the circle's activities to other non-participating employees, while another part-timer was given the role of a second "data chief". I was designated as responsible for "mood",[9] which was explained to me as meaning that I was to report on the mood of the circle, and the floor manager, Mr Tanaka, was in charge of "discussions". In practice, however, I found that with the exception of the role of secretary these roles were purely nominal. No forum existed for Mrs Sato to report back on the group's activities, or for me to report on mood, and in fact neither of us did more

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[8] See Chapter Nine.

[9] This word was used in English.

than attend and participate in meetings. And leadership of the meetings was assumed by the section chiefs rather than by the relatively inexperienced Mr Kimura, or the manager, who preferred to keep a low profile. The final report on the circle's activities was composed by the sub-leader, Mrs Arakawa.

The themes to be addressed by the circles were decided at the monthly *seishain* meetings, with a different theme selected by each floor. In principle, the themes were meant to be chosen by discussion among all the *seishain* from each floor, but in practice, as far as our floor was concerned, the theme was suggested by one of the section chiefs and everyone else simply assented. The theme thus selected for our floor was: How to improve the shift system to create greater efficiency at work. This was broken down into two objectives: how to make eveybody's work easier and more enjoyable, and how to increase our speed of work. The reasons given for the choice of theme were twofold. Firstly that the shifts were in difficulties and individual employees were unable to finish their work because many part-timers took time off on Sundays and public holidays, and because there were a lot of "four hour" part-timers: that is, part timers who worked for only four hours a day instead of the usual six. Secondly, the need to train new employees, both part-timers and full company members, had a similar effect in that it increased the workload of long-serving employees, and made it difficult for them to complete their allocated daily tasks. The circle's policy was to "listen meekly[10] to everybody's opinions", and the only rule laid down was that everyone had to express his or her opinion at least once in the course of a meeting.

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[10] The word used in Japanese was *sunao*.

During this particular With Circle campaign, the circles met a total of nine times. Four meetings, of fifteen minutes each, were held in the morning, instead of the regular morning meetings. Two forty-five minute meetings were held on Sundays before work, and a further three ninety minute meetings were held after working hours. The effect of this arrangement was to limit the participation of the part-time staff, as they were only able to attend the short morning meetings, and, in some cases, the Sunday meetings. The evening meetings were attended exclusively by *seishain*, and were used in part to prepare data for subsequent meetings in which all circle members were able to participate. A description of one of the Sunday meetings, transcribed from my field notes, may serve to convey the flavour of the proceedings.

> Sunday 28th April. All circle members assembled in one corner of the first floor, forty-five minutes before the store's opening. Theme: Why aren't the shifts efficient? Chart prepared by Mr Kimura showed three fundamental problems: time taken in training new staff; many part-timers take days off on Sundays and public holidays; staff responsible for training new staff are too busy to explain things to trainees. Mr Kimura went through these points briefly, then Miss Nishiguchi distributed blank pieces of paper to all the circle members on which we were told to write all the further problems we thought arose from these problems. After a few minutes, these were collected by Miss Nishiguchi, read out, and pinned to the chart next to the problem to which they were thought to relate. Some examples were: nobody available to deal with customer queries or complaints (Many part-timers take days off on Saturdays and Sundays); junior staff unable to perform some basic tasks like gift-wrapping or operating the cash register (staff responsible for training new staff are too busy).
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> Finally, we all brainstormed solutions to the problems. Some solutions suggested included harmonising trainers' and trainees' days off to ensure maximum on-the-job training, and getting all staff to practise gift-wrapping on empty boxes during slack periods at the store. I suggested tackling the problem of staff shortages at the weekends by paying the part-timers extra to work on Sundays. (I had been told by part-timers at Futajimaya that the Seiyū store next door to the Hatakeda branch of Futajimaya did this, and that this was one reason Futajimaya was losing staff to Seiyū.) This suggestion was greeted with polite "mmm" noises, but not taken up by any of the other circle members. We ran out of time while the brainstorming was still going on - to be continued.

Subsequent With Circle Meetings continued this brainstorming process, and in due course a plan of action was devised, essentially involving on-the-job training for existing employees to ensure that everyone understood how to operate the cash register and could gift wrap fast and neatly. In addition, the floor manager and the section chiefs undertook to ensure that all sections were staffed at all times, and it was agreed that staff should be prepared to help out in sections other than their own where necessary, consulting the store manuals for information if they were not sure about, for example, where particular goods were kept. The entire proceedings of the circle were summarised in a report, together with charts showing "before and after" - for example, how many people could gift wrap two handkerchiefs in a presentation box before and after the training instituted by the circle, and the average time taken to do this. This report was then submitted to head office, and an area meeting was later held to go over the results of all the With Circles. Prizes were allotted to circles that were judged by the company management to have performed particularly well, one of which was won by our circle. My suggestion about extra pay for part-timers working on Sundays was dropped from the final report - I was told that such matters were beyond the scope of the circle.

Two years later, on a return visit to the store, I asked those who had participated in this circle how they evaluated the With Circle campaign. They generally agreed that it had been effective in the short-term, improving staff performance on matters such as gift-wrapping and the cash desk, but that within a short space of time things returned to the way they had been before. Assessments of why this was varied. Mr Kimura said he thought the root of the problem in the first place was simply that the staff did not want to do troublesome jobs, like gift-wrapping, or dealing with customers in sections with which they were unfamiliar. They had

made a brief effort for the duration of the campaign, and then promptly gone back to their old ways. Mrs Sato, on the other hand, thought that the circle failed because it did not tackle fundamental problems, like the high turnover of staff, and inadequate training. Training staff to, for example, gift wrap, had only a short-term effect because as soon as new staff arrived it had to be done all over again. She was particularly critical of the practice of putting new part-timers to work immediately with no prior training, and suggested they needed at least a week's training before being put to work in the store (the same as that received by the new *seishain*).

The overall assessment of both Mr Kimura and Mrs Sato was that the circles had been *"tatemae", "miseru dake"* (a front, just for show), an idea of top management that had never had aroused any enthusiasm among the ordinary staff. They pointed to the fact that the practice of having these circles had been dropped since the change of managing director as evidence that they had never been either popular or effective, and suggested that they had probably been a pet project of the former managing director. On asking Mr Kimura again why matters such as the pay of part-timers had not been addressed by the circle, he told me he thought this was irrelevant, that the shortage of part-timers willing to work on Sundays was due to their family commitments and had nothing to do with money. Pressing him a little further, he reiterated that such matters were beyond the scope of the circle, which was properly only concerned with things that "we can do",[11] not things decided by the "top people".[12] He explained that in order to change things decided by the top people different channels operated - the member of staff first talked to the floor manager, who would then take the matter up with the branch

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[11] In Japanese, *wareware dekiru koto.*
[12] In Japanese, *ue no hito*

manager, who might then take it further. Sometimes this procedure worked, sometimes not.

A number of things struck me from this conversation. Firstly, if Mr Kimura was a typical example, the younger *seishain* were very out of touch with the concerns of the part-timers, many of whom had complained to me about their low wages, and had specifically mentioned the lack of incentives to work on Sundays. Indeed, there was no forum within the company for the two categories of employee to communicate their concerns, as even "consultative" bodies like the With Circle had an implicitly limited agenda. Secondly, the With Circle in Futajimaya was only consultative in a very restricted sense, as it was not intended to address basic matters of company policy and practice such as pay and high staff turnover, but only the question of how employees might perform better within the existing corporate structure. It therefore seems to me that the "With Circle" might be more accurately described as concerned with self-criticism on the part of the employees rather than consultation on how corporate performance might be improved from a more general perspective. In the wider context of Japanese society, the analogy here is with the *hanseikai*, or reflection circles, that abound in Japanese organisations from schools to sports clubs, and also including companies. These are small groups that meet in order to reflect jointly on any shortcomings of the group, collectively or individually, and then suggest ways of remedying these shortcomings. For example, a football team might hold a *hanseikai* after losing a match, to discuss what went wrong, and how they can do better in future.

In the context of Futajimaya, the With circle campaign might be properly considered alongside the TOUCH heart campaign described above, as both were overtly consultative, but in fact interpreted by employees as inviting

self-criticism, and generally regarded as mere *tatemae* exercises. The With Circle's final report was also reminiscent of the TOUCH heart forms: a description of where employees were currently at fault was followed by a statement of how they planned to improve the situation, with floor and branch managers' comments appended at the bottom. Even the wording of the managers' comments was similar, exhorting the employees to "do your best". For example, on the report by the circle in which I participated the branch manager commented:

> Double check your section and look out for anything unusual. Almost every day there are many things that were supposed to be done that do not get done. Together, everyone must do their best, cooperatively and individually.

Thus we return to the familiar discourse of all employees cooperating together to achieve corporate goals. In this discourse, any problems at work (including matters such as staff shortages or inadequate training) appear to be the result of a failure on the part of the individual employees to try hard enough, or to cooperate fully with each other. And if everyone does their best "cooperatively and individually" the problems will be solved. Company policy itself is not called into question, and senior management is beyond criticism. Indeed, the idea of senior management as a separate entity with goals distinct from those of ordinary employees is notable by its absence, thus placing the formal discourse of the With circle campaign neatly in the realm of consensual Japanese management.

However, as we have seen, ordinary employees at Futajimaya, whether part-timers or *seishain*, did make a very clear distinction between themselves *and* senior management, commonly referred to as the people at the top, as distinct from "us". And the part-timers, who were the main target of the "increase the efficiency of the shift" campaign, did not identify the problems of the shift as arising from lack of effort on their

part. How was it, then, that the formal discourse of the With Circle campaign was left unchallenged? I think that the answer to this lies in the implicit understanding among the employees of the appropriate discourse in this context. Everyone (except the ignorant visiting anthropologist) knew what sort of statements and actions were expected of them, and felt it was pointless to stray outside these limits. Also, the campaign operated within a number of significant constraints: the themes addressed were in practice defined by senior staff, few part-timers were given the opportunity to participate, and those that did were not able to participate in all stages of the circle, nor did they have a hand in the compilation of the final report. From this, most part-timers to whom I spoke surmised that the With Circle was not concerned to obtain their views.

But perhaps most importantly, the With Circle was, like the TOUCH heart campaign, a highly public activity within the company. It was impossible to give one's views anonymously in this context, and everyone knew that his or her contribution would be assessed by senior management. Such a public forum was not seen as the correct context for criticism of company policy, which was done either privately, behind the scenes, with the outcome known only to a handful of people, or anonymously through the company union. (The company union survey, referred to in previous chapters, was one forum in which employees could be, and were, highly critical of the company). Ironically, overtly consultative activities could not really be consultative precisely because they were overt, and therefore tended to disguise tensions and problems and to obscure communication between senior and junior levels of the company.

Thus, as we have seen in earlier chapters, setting had an important influence on the kinds of things people said about the company,

particularly in so far as it placed what was said along the private-public continuum. But not all settings were wholly private or wholly public, many allowed for both public and private interactions between employees, thus making it possible to draw a contrast between the two. This contrast was particularly noticeable at social events organised by the company, as described in more detail below.

10.2 Company organised social events

Company social events were organised on both a branch and a regional basis, and included parties to mark the arrival or departure of *seishain*; day trips; short holidays of two or three days; and all day festivals and sports days. Aside from the parties, which were organised and financed at a branch level, social events were organised and paid for by the company union. I was told by a senior union official that the organisation of such events was one of the principal roles of the union, along with activities more familiar to a British observer: campaigning for improved wages and conditions for the union members, and providing a channel through which staff could express grievances. Union membership was limited to *seishain* below the rank of branch manager, and one sub-category of part-timer, the *teijishain.* Participation in union events was, however, generally open to all employees, whatever their status.

Although attendance at these social events was optional for all categories of employee, in fact employee participation followed a regular and predictable pattern, with the vast majority of participants being the young unmarried *seishain*, both male and female. They were also well attended by older men of the rank of manager and upwards, and by the casual work force of the young male *arubaito.* With the exception of branch organised

parties, *pāto* rarely attended these events, and generally there were very few women over the age of thirty whether *pāto* or *seishain*. The older women who did attend usually had a special reason for doing so - fondness for the particular sport being played in a company sports contest; being married to another company employee (so they could attend the event as husband and wife); or being temporarily alone owing to the husband working far away (and therefore having a lot of time on their hands) were some of the reasons given by older women to whom I spoke.

For the younger *seishain* and the *arubaito* , the main reason for attending these events was simply that they enjoyed them. Most of the participants were people of a similar age, and the events were aimed at young people. Because of this, these company outings provided the perfect opportunity for unmarried male and female employees to mingle socially and to get to know each other without going so far as to formally date. These opportunities to get to know each other were important, as it is often difficult in Japan to meet people of the opposite sex except through one's work or school. Company social events attracted almost 100% attendance by young male *seishain*, many of whom might expect to find a bride through the company, and were also well attended by the young male *arubaito*. And for the female *seishain* who were new to the company, and whose family and non-company friends were far away, few other opportunities to socialise with their own age group presented themselves. It is also relevant to note that the costs of the day's outing were met entirely by the company, so for the younger participants, whose wages were low, it was a good opportunity to get together with people of a similar age without putting extra strain on their limited budget.

As for the older male managers, their role differed depending on the kind of event concerned. For events organised at a branch level the senior staff attended mainly in a supervisory capacity, to ensure the younger employees did not get out of hand. A typical branch organised event consisted of a day out including a barbecue lunch at some popular leisure area, often a funfair, although the branches did also organise short trips away, perhaps to a hot-spring resort, or to go skiing. The tone was generally very informal, with no rigid timetable for the day, and the younger employees passed their time chatting and joking, commenting on each other's appearance and teasing each other. For example, one young man was nicknamed "fox" because of the shape of his face, and was teased mercilessly by the young women, though he seemed to bear the teasing with remarkable equanimity.

These branch organised events contrasted in a number of ways with the more formal regionally based social events, at which staff from all the branches in a given geographical area gathered together. Firstly, obviously the regional events were on a much larger scale, and in part because of this necessitated much more formal organisation than did day trips such as the one described above. Whereas the day trips typically had few organised activities except for lunch, and the participants were left very much up to their own devices, regional events usually had a fixed timetable of events, complete with opening and closing speeches. Secondly, although young *seishain* were still numerically preponderant and older women largely absent, senior male staff were much more in evidence at these events. This was partly because it was expected that branch managers would attend, but also because regional events provided an opportunity for male managerial staff from the level of floor manager upwards to meet friends either from the same intake or from previous stints in other

branches. These events were also attended by the managing director and the appropriate regional director; although they kept themselves at a distance from the rest of the employees.

One of the major regional social events in the Futajimaya year is the sports day, or *undōkai*, which has been held every spring for more than twenty years. Company sports days are common in Japan, and form a continuation of a practice begun in pre-school - even day-care centres in Japan have sports days. They are also organised on a neighbourhood basis as a way of creating a sense of community (Ben Ari 1991). The origin of the *undōkai* can be traced back to the *kyōtō yūgikai* (Fighting and Playing Meet) first held at the Tokyo Naval Academy in 1874. In one Japanese pamphlet explaining this custom the *undōkai* is summarised in the following terms:

> the idea is to encourage participation by all, regardless of age or gender, so the emphasis is on sports that require no special skills, such as three-legged racing, tug-of-war, ball games, and relay races.
> Hot Communication October 1993[2]

In 1991, Futajimaya held their sports day for the Kanto region in the Budokan in central Tokyo, a popular concert venue, not unlike Wembley arena in London. It was attended by about twenty five or so staff from the Hatakeda branch, and similar numbers from all the other branches in the area, and was held on a day when all Futajimaya branches were closed.

The Hatakeda branch members all met at 7.45 a.m. to travel to the Budokan, arriving about half an hour before the opening ceremony at 10.00 a.m. Initially, we were ushered upstairs to our designated seating area, but after we had deposited our bags, we went back down to the floor of the arena, where we sat in a line, with the store manager at the front. After all the

[2]This is taken from one of a series of pamphlets distributed to subscribers(together with the monthly telephone bill) by an international telephone company in Japan.

branches had assembled in this way, coloured ribbons were distributed, with a different colour for each branch, which we were told to tie around our heads. For our branch, this was all that distinguished us from the other branches, as we were all in casual sports clothes, with the exception of the younger male staff who were members of the company baseball team, and had changed into their baseball uniforms shortly after we arrived. Some of the other branches, however, wore identical brightly coloured T-shirts in addition to the obligatory ribbons.

At 10.10 a.m. the sports day formally began with a short speech by the Master of Ceremonies from a raised platform on the floor of the arena. Then a spotlight appeared, seeming to search the arena until it settled on a sort of royal box above the arena, lighting up the face of the managing director. A loudspeaker boomed out: "The managing director, Mr..." The managing director then stood up, smiling, arms outstretched, to receive the applause of the audience. Two other dignitaries seated beside him in the box were also announced. Then the lights were dimmed, there was a drum roll, and slides of fireworks were projected onto a large screen, to applause and laughter. The managing director and the other dignitaries remained standing, with spotlights lighting their faces from below.

After the fireworks slideshow, three aerobics instructors mounted the stage and began to demonstrate some exercises to music, while we all followed as best we could, still lined up by branch behind the branch managers. We then returned to our seats upstairs, and the main program began. Punctuated by a packed lunch and drinks provided by the company, which we ate in our seats upstairs, this program consisted of a mixture of fairly ordinary sporting events, such as races, as well as more light-hearted events.

One of the more standard sporting events was a race held in separate age groups, from under thirties up to the over fifties. Each branch cheered their own representatives on enthusiastically, using cheer leaders, rhythmic clapping, and pompons that were waved in the air. There was cheering when a branch member won, and some amusement at the efforts of the older representatives, including the Hatakeda branch manager, who came next to last in his group. More light-hearted events included a contest to see which branch could fit most people onto a wooden box (of the kind used for vaulting in gymnastics). This event in particular caused a great deal of hilarity.

From a non-Japanese point of view, this sports day seems at first glance to be an example par excellence of the corporate spirit at work. It finds a ready echo in the stereotypes, lovingly dwelt on by the media, of the serried ranks of Japanese employees doing their morning calisthenics on the factory floor. However, a closer examination throws some doubt on this interpretation. Firstly, sports days of this kind are, as pointed out above, common to all large institutions in Japan. Therefore, much the same strictures apply as were made in Chapter Five for the company entrance ceremony: this kind of event should not be seen as part of a special type of company lifestyle but rather as continuous with general social practice in Japan. The sports day is a very familiar setting to all the participants from school and university, as is the discourse of amicable competitiveness within a general frame of corporate unity that pervades such occasions.

Secondly, alongside the formal events of the day, a more informal mingling of the staff was taking place. In addition to the lunch break, there were frequent breaks between events, and at any one time only a minority of the

staff were participating in the races and other contests. This meant that there was ample opportunity for chatting and socialising with other employees. Most of this took place within the blocks where we were seated separately according to branch. However, it was noticeable that many of the older male employees were circulating among the blocks, exchanging greetings with other men of a similar age, and sometimes stopping for a chat and a beer before moving on. This was a pattern I saw repeated again and again at company social events, and older male *seishain* to whom I spoke commented that they looked forward to these events as they were an opportunity to meet friends they had made during their initial training or on earlier postings, who now worked for a different store.

Such friendships were important not only on a personal level, but also because they served as the basis for establishing one's own individual network within the company. These networks were often very important in getting things done, where the cooperation of other sections or branches of the company became necessary: it was not unusual, for example, for a branch manager to ask one of his junior managers to approach a friend in another section in order to get something done, rather than approaching the section head himself directly. It was also obvious at these events that senior figures were particularly assiduously cultivated by their male colleagues, while those who had been sidelined in the promotion stakes also tended to find themselves sidelined socially.[13]

It would therefore seem that the significance of these company-organised social events shifts somewhat depending on the perspective from which they are viewed. On a formal level, they are a celebration of the company

[13] This was the fate of Mr Kohama, the former manager of the Hatakeda branch as described in Chapter Eight.

as a corporate group, with an emphasis on the symbols of corporate unity - the Futajimaya logo, always prominently displayed, and the managing director himself, who, as the son of the founder of Futajimaya, represented the founding family of the firm. The sports day, in particular, can be read as a metaphor for the organisation and philosophy of the company as a whole, with its emphasis on the virtues of teamwork, and the competition between branches, all subsumed by a wider corporate loyalty. However, as we have seen, from the perspective of the company members the same events can be opportunities for strengthening personal networks, or simply a free day out and a chance to socialise with others of the same age.

These events also tend to underline the way in which employees are divided by generation and gender. As remarked above, older women in general, and *pāto* in particular, only attend in very small numbers, in contrast to the situation in the stores themselves, where these employees are in the majority. This tends to emphasise the marginal status of the older women, and the corporate norm of a core of male *seishain* who will remain with the company until retirement,with female *seishain* being generally young and unmarried. In fact, there is little incentive for older women to attend - in the main, the events are aimed at the young, and are a forum where the unmarried of both sexes can mingle. And the networking activities of the older men is irrelevant to their female contemporaries - whether *pāto* or *seishain* they are excluded from the male career ladder, and confined to one branch for the duration of their working lives. Thus they have neither the opportunity nor the motivation to try and establish links with employees in other branches.

There was, however, one company organised event at which the marginal status of the older women employees at Futajimaya was turned to their, and

the company's advantage, and they were able for once to take centre stage. This was the *Chōbikai*, or luxury goods sale, an event that was not strictly speaking part of the company's social calendar, but which was used as a social gathering by the *oba-san* generation.

10.3 Employee as consumer: the *chōbikai*

The *chōbikai* (literally, forever beautiful meeting) was a luxury goods sale lasting two or three days that was held three times a year at a top class hotel in central Tokyo. Goods sold included jewellery, kimonos, and European brand name leather goods. Everything was very expensive, with a few items carrying such a high price tag that one could only presume they were there simply for display purposes. For example, a forty centimetre long gold tiger with stripes made of diamonds and emerald eyes was priced at thirty million yen - the equivalent of £120,000 at 1991 rates, enough to buy a small house in suburban Tokyo. Customers attended by invitation only, assembling at the branch by which they had been invited first thing in the morning to be bussed to the hotel. The expressed aim of these sales, as explained to me by a senior manager, was to try to emulate the more prestigious department stores, with their tradition of supplying luxury goods and providing individual service to wealthy customers.

However, as the same manager confirmed, in fact most of those attending are not exceptionally wealthy. Rather, the unusual feature of this sale is that almost all the customers are friends or acquaintances of the sales staff in the stores. Prior to each sale, there is a concerted campaign within the store to get all the staff to sign up as many customers as possible to attend the sale. That is, in theory this campaign is aimed at all the staff, but in practice it is focused on the older women, in the main the *pāto*, but also the older female *seishain*. This is for two main reasons: firstly these women are

of the same age and gender as Futajimaya's main target market, middle-aged women who, in Japan, control the spending of their household's income. They are therefore the employees the most likely to be able to introduce suitable customers to the sale.

Secondly, the older women, both *seishain* and *pāto* , tend to have locally-based networks of friends that they can call on. The *pāto* are, as we have already seen, recruited locally, and thus already possess these networks when they join the company. For the female *seishain*, on the other hand, the picture changes over time. As they are mainly recruited from remote rural areas,[14] the younger among them tend to lack local connections. However, unlike the male *seishain*, the female *seishain* spend all their working lives at the same branch, so as their length of service extends they too develop locally based networks of friends and acquaintances. A number of the female *seishain* at Hatakeda had married local men, generally leaving their jobs at Futajimaya on marriage or on the birth of their first child. These women remained friendly with those of their former colleagues who were still employed by the store, and the *chōbikai* was one occasion when they had an opportunity to get together.

The *chōbikai* was therefore transformed by those who attended from a sales event to a social occasion and Futajimaya old girls' reunion. Although some of the staff were paid to attend and to look after the customers, as a small group of thirty or so women gathered in front of the Hatakeda store on the first morning of the sale it became obvious that several of the customers were also part-time employees, attending on their day off. As we chatted, it transpired that others were former employees of the store. Although disenchanted with Futajimaya as an employer - one woman explained she

[14] See Chapter Five.

had been forced to give up her *seishain* position on becoming pregnant, and although she was subsequently re-employed as a part-timer had left because the part-time wages were too low - they seemed happy to return as customers and to renew their friendship with their ex-colleagues. In addition, these outings gave them the opportunity to have a day out away from their families - although almost all were married, no husbands and only a few older children attended, the younger children having been left in their father's care for the day in most cases. As it is rare for parents of young children to go out together without the children in tow, such all-female outings are one of the few opportunities married women in Japan have for a break from the daily grind of household labour, childrearing, and, in many cases, paid employment.

When we had all assembled, we were led onto a specially hired tour coach by the deputy branch manager. After we had taken our seats, a red jacketted tour guide gave a short speech of welcome and bowed, after which everyone clapped. This was followed by a speech by the deputy branch manager, who explained the purchasing method at the sale - it was enough simply to sign for the goods, which would then be sent to the Hatakeda branch to be passed on to the customer on receipt of the amount due. He also explained that free gifts would be distributed at the end of the sale, exchangeable for gift vouchers on request. As an extra spur to spend more money, he added that there would be a prize draw into which customers would automatically be entered if they spent more than ¥200,000 (about £800.00 at 1991 prices). He concluded by expressing, in very formal and deferential Japanese, his hope that we would enjoy the *chōbikai.* This, too, was greeted with applause, after which we settled back into our seats to enjoy the journey. Refreshments (canned juice, tea and coffee) were

served to us in our seats by a young male employee, and the tour guide commented on the sights as our bus swung through central Tokyo.

Once at the hotel, we were ushered to the floor where the sale was taking place, and then left to our own devices. The sale was quite crowded, full of small groups of women browsing and chatting, many of them a mix of present and past employees. I was surprised to see one usually fairly dour section chief of the Hatakeda branch being addressed by her first name with the suffix *-chan* - a very familiar form of address in Japanese - by some other women who turned out to be former fellow employees. The section chief appeared to be thoroughly enjoying herself, and was more relaxed than I had ever seen her. An hour or so after our arrival a full course meal was served in the dining room of the hotel, followed by coffee, after which shopping resumed. Most people I spoke to seemed to have bought one or two items, enough to ensure that the event was highly profitable for the company, and also gaining kudos for the individual employee who had invited them.[15] At about 4.00 p.m. the customers headed down to the hotel foyer to collect their free gifts and catch the coach home. In addition to this basic programme, at some *chōbikai* a guest celebrity attended to demonstrate the goods, for example a famous actress in Japanese period dramas was invited to discuss how to wear the Japanese kimono.[16]

The *chōbikai* was an event where the lines between outsider and insider were unusually blurred. Looking at the participants, it was hard to tell which were and were not current staff members, since not all the current staff were wearing uniform, and staff and customers alike were furnished

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[15] Sales were all recorded by name, and credited to the employee who had introduced the customer. Those whose customers spent the most could expect a small cash prize.
[16] The kimono is not now generally worn in everyday life by most Japanese women, and the correct manner of putting it on and wearing it are skills that are no longer automatically acquired.

with identical rosettes identifying the branch under whose auspices they were attending. The conspicuous lines of division were rather those of gender and generation. The younger *seishain*, both male and female, were few in number and all attended in their working capacity. They were delegated to a service role, standing behind the displays of goods and taking orders where necessary, while the senior male managers stood on the sidelines supervising the proceedings. But the focus was on the *oba-san*, both in and out of uniform, they were the customers and it was very much their day.

The usual status hierarchy of the company thus appeared to be inverted. Whether ex-employees, low-status part-timers, or older female *seishain* who had "failed" to leave at the age considered appropriate, here the middle-aged women were in a position of privilege, courted for their custom. The fact that such women often had stronger ties to their neighbourhood than to their employer was here turned to their advantage. In the context of the *chōbikai*, they became mediators between company and customer, an ambiguous mix of customer and employee. And this in turn highlighted the irony of the position of female employees at Futajimaya - barred from significant promotion within the company, their only path to gaining status was to leave and return as the privileged outsider, the customer.

Conclusion

Returning to the issues raised at the beginning of this chapter: the notion of corporate unity at Futajimaya appears to be problematic, even when viewed from the perspective of company organised group events and activities. Indeed the dividing line between insider and outsider is often

unclear - to paraphrase Orwell, some insiders are more inside than others. As we have seen above, older women and part-timers in particular occupy an ambiguous zone on the periphery of the company, between locally-based customer and company-centred employee. The issue here is not only one of formal corporate membership - the *seishain-pāto* divide - but also gender and generation in a conceptual scheme that defines all women as temporary employees, and expects them to transfer their allegiance away from the company as they get older. Far from the clearly-bounded, vertically-organised group postulated by Nakane, the boundaries of Futajimaya are often hazy, and links between different status categories of employee weak.

Conversely, the horizontal divide between "us" and "the people at the top" was often stressed by the more junior employees, male and female, *pāto* and *seishain* alike. Concerning the notion of consensus, there was a general perception among these employees that their opinions were irrelevant, and that the real business of consultation and decision making took place in the innermost of inner circles - among senior male management. Apparently consultative activities that involved these junior employees, such as the With circle or the Touch HEART campaign were dismissed by them as being *tatemae*, just for show.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the rank and file of the employees therefore constituted an alienated mass. For one thing, the junior employees themselves were a very diverse group. Indeed the word group is probably misleading as the ties between different categories of junior employee, for example newly recruited male *seishain* and female *pato*, were weak to non-existent. It is also evident that many aspects of corporate activities were widely enjoyed, and participated in with great

enthusiasm. This was the case, for example, at the company social events, which were particularly popular with the younger employees, even those who complained that the work at Futajimaya was boring and that they had no intention of staying there long term. And even the *pāto*, who rarely participated in union organised activities, managed to create their own social event at the *chōbikai.*

This in turn highlights another important point. Group activities at Futajimaya were not merely passively endured by employees obediently following a pattern predetermined by management. Rather, the employees acted on and frequently transformed the frame they were given. Social events that were nominally a celebration of the corporate group became opportunities for working on one's own personal network. Luxury sales became a day out away from husband and children and a chance to relax with old friends. Even the With circle and TOUCH heart campaigns, both of which were unpopular management imposed events, were reinterpreted by the employees as being *tatemae* , just for show - from which it followed that they could be safely ignored once a reasonable time had elapsed.

The same themes that have already been discussed in earlier chapters again arise here: notably the importance of divisions of gender and generation within the company, and the way in which the frame provided by the company may be interpreted and used differently depending on the context and on the employee concerned. The company appears not as a monolithic entity enveloping its members, but rather as a flexibly bounded arena within which official and more personal agendas and representations of company-employee relations interacted in a dynamic way. This interaction, and its consequences for the ways in which the

notion of "the company" may be defined in a Japanese context, are explored further in the conclusion to this thesis.

Part Three

Conclusion

Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

It has been shown in this thesis that even in the case of one large-scale Japanese company there exists a multiplicity of representations of the company, and of company-employee relations, which shift according to context. A variety of contexts have been reviewed here, arranged approximately along a scale from outside to inside (the culturally significant categories of *soto* and *uchi*). Taking the broadest *soto/uchi* contrast first, although Japanese companies are consistently represented outside Japan as homogeneous, characterised by harmonious relations among employees, and structured along the same principles as the Japanese household, within Japan a range of contrasting discourses are evoked.

11.1 The *shinjinrui* and competing discourses of adulthood

In the context of recruitment, far from appearing homogeneous, the differences among companies are stressed, as each seeks to project a distinct corporate identity. Further, the discourse appealed to in the drive to recruit new graduate employees is that of Japan's youth, the *shinjinrui*. Rather than emphasising what these new employees will be expected to give the company, whether in terms of work effort or commitment to the organisation, during the labour shortage of 1990-1991 large Tokyo-based companies were at pains to stress the material benefits they could offer their employees, and the ways in which they could assist new recruits to attain the urban lifestyle they desired.

Employment, in this context, became a branch of consumerism, with the companies packaging themselves as consumer products for their potential recruits. The language of the recruitment drive, too, differed markedly

from that familiar in Western language representations of "the Japanese company". Rather than appeals to Japanese uniqueness, or Japanese management, the emphasis was on creating an international image, as stressed in the high frequency of Western loan words used. It is also noteworthy that recruitment material made repeated reference to "individuality", with words such as *dokujisei*, *kosei*, (both meaning individuality) and *jibun* (self).

However, although companies vying to snare new graduates underlined the ways in which the company would respond to them as individuals, in particular by offering time off and facilities to enjoy leisure interests, company recruitment brochures and videos tended to emphasise company organised group leisure activities, such as team sports or company trips. The group dimension was thus present, but relatively underemphasised. And although the representations of Japanese companies in the context of the annual recruitment drive stress the differences among companies, as far as any single company is concerned the image conveyed tends to be one of a relatively harmonious, consensual entity. Where problems are admitted, the emphasis is placed on the importance of everyone working together to overcome them. Thus conflict is largely absent from these representations of Japanese companies to a domestic audience.

So as we begin to move inwards from the extreme limit of the outside, or *soto*, that is from the representation of Japanese companies for a foreign audience to their representation for the domestic audience, some important discursive shifts are already evident. However, as discussed in Chapter One, section 1.4, *soto* and *uchi* are relative terms. Although the Japanese domestic audience are part of the *uchi* that is Japan, and are on the inside relative to foreigners, they are still outsiders to the company. Therefore

the discourse of the recruitment drive remains in an important sense an outsider-oriented one in which companies are very much concerned to present themselves at their best: internal company conflict is largely hidden, and an image is created of a youthful, supportive environment, in which individual company members can make friends with others of the same generation and gain access to the world of urban, independent youth celebrated by the Japanese mass media in television dramas, films, magazines, and music.

As we move inside again and examine the training programme for new company members and the subsequent induction ceremony, the discourse used by the company changes once more. Here, the emphasis is on the transformation of the new recruits. The primary transformation stressed by company management was that of student to member of society, or *shakaijin*, and secondarily that of student to member of Futajimaya, or outsider to insider. However the sub-text was that of transformation from child to adult, the last in a series of transitions begun with entrance to kindergarten. At stake in these events are competing discourses of adulthood in Japan.

As explained in Chapter Five, the existence of more than one discourse of adulthood in Japan is recognised implicitly in the Japanese language, where the English notion of "adulthood" can be translated by a range of Japanese words, all with slightly different nuances. It was also recognised explicitly by the Futajimaya trainers, who contrasted the recruits' expectations of adulthood as bestowing freedom with the strict rules governing their appearance and behaviour that Futajimaya expected them to observe.

From the company management's point of view, adulthood was equated with becoming a *shakaijin*, a member of society, and with a consequent shift from an emphasis on rights to one on duties - to fellow employees and to the company that paid everyone's salaries. On the level of official, management generated discourse, there was an emphasis on many features of company life familiar from the *Nihonjinron* type of representation familiar outside Japan. Hierarchy, respect for seniors, and cooperation with fellow employees were stressed, as was the importance of overcoming personal likes and dislikes. Unlike the recruitment literature, with its emphasis on the fulfilment of individual aspirations, training literature exhorted the new recruits to change their way of thinking from one centred on the self (*jibun*) to one grounded on "teamwork" (*chiimuwāku*), defined as based on the recognition of one's position and role within the workgroup and wider organisation.

One event of particular interest here was the highly formalised company entrance ceremony. In this ceremony, with its rigid structure composed of a series of monologues with a highly predictable content, more general anthropological concerns regarding formalised speech become relevant. Reference was made in Chapter Six to Bloch's argument (1975) that formalised speech tends to create a 'tunnel effect', where disagreement and debate are impossible. However, it was shown that although overt challenge was certainly impossible during the entrance ceremony, there was plenty of low key resistance by the participants. And, perhaps more importantly, the kind of discourse used on this occasion was shown to be only one of a number of available discourses drawn upon in different contexts. Alternative views of the significance of adulthood and of joining a company can be found both in depictions in popular culture, and in the

representation of company-employee relations generated by the company itself in the annual recruitment drive.

From the recruits' point of view, entering the company signalled the achievement of independence from parental restrictions, and the dawn of what is a relatively privileged period in the life course of most Japanese people: young adulthood. Until marriage, another crucial watershed for both men and women, the concerns of these young adults were dominated more by the forming of friendships within their own generation and by their leisure interests, than by notions of duties and responsibilities. Entry to the company, then, constituted an important life-course marker both from the point of view of the recruits and from the point of view of the official discourse of company management. But the significance of this marker was an area of contested meanings, with a disjuncture between official and unofficial, formal and informal discourses.

As far as the company entrance ceremony is concerned, its significance stretches beyond the statement it makes of the new relationship inaugurated between company and employee, with one important role of the ceremony being to mark out the company's position within the wider society. In its assertion of the cultural norms governing company-employee relations and the aquisition of maturity in Japan, Futajimaya used a discourse of social relations that, as shown in Chapter Six, is common to most large organisations in Japan, from kindergarten upwards, and thus marked its own position within the ranks of Japan's large corporations. In contrast, during the recruitment drive, where the focus was on the company's presentation of itself to potential new recruits, and on appearing attractive to the *shinjinrui* generation, quite a different

representation of adulthood and company-employee relations could be observed.

Alternative representations of company-employee relations can thus be seen to coexist, and are drawn on by the company in different contexts. And these in turn relate to alternative perspectives on adulthood, as on the one hand achieving independence and freedom from restrictions; and on the other accepting responsibilities, duties, and further restrictions. The company is thus implicated in debates on maturity and life-course, as becomes clearer when we move from a focus on the young full-time recruits to considering some individual accounts of particular employees and their relationships with the company.

11.2 Work, Life course, and constructions of gender

An examination of the narratives of individual employees draws us into a consideration of constructions of gender in Japanese society, and the ways in which gender considerations frame the role of work in life-course. Although the idealised constructions of male and female life-course in Japan show clear differences, with men's lives centred around the workplace, and women's lives around the home, the material presented here shows more similarities between the actual narratives of male and female employees than might be expected.

Marriage appeared as a watershed in both men's and women's lives, but with different consequences. For men the responsibilities of "pillar of the household" acquired on marriage tended to increase their allegiance to, and dependence on, the company to which they belonged, or to push them into making a firm commitment to a company if they had not previously done so. For women, on the other hand, marriage incurred a shift in the

way they were expected to prioritise their commitments, with husband clearly ranking above company. For most, this was coupled with the expectation that marriage would be rapidly followed by children and resignation from the company. But even for those who remained without children and continued to be employed by Futajimaya, promotion prospects were dim, and pressures to leave tended to mount over the years. And if a direct conflict between company and marital responsibilities ever occurred, there was little doubt as to how it would be resolved, as the case of Mrs Arakawa demonstrates. The pressures operating against married women rising up the career ladder find further illustration in the case of the only woman manager encountered during this study - who had remained unmarried.

But if the paths of men and women employed by Futajimaya tended to diverge after marriage, for those who had not yet reached the age thought to be appropriate for marriage, views of the company and its role in their future showed a degree of convergence across the gender barrier. This is particularly striking in the case of women full company members and male temporary staff, the *furiita*. For both these categories of employee, work at Futajimaya tended to be important as a means to a goal located outside the company. Of course, for women and temporary staff no long term commitment to the company was expected. However, among younger male full company members too there was a significant proportion who envisaged Futajimaya as an interlude in their lives; a way to escape home and earn a wage; an acceptable stopgap, but one that might be jettisoned if a better alternative could be found.

It was also interesting to note the discrepancy between these young employees' view of the role of work in their lives and the socially

sanctioned view in Japan of work as a path to maturity through hardship. The improvement of working and dormitory conditions over recent years in Futajimaya was noted with regret by some of the older employees, who felt that something important had been lost in the process, and that young employees were no longer as tractable and diligent as they had been in the days preceding the labour shortage.

Finally, considering the case of the middle aged female part-timers, the interplay of outside work and domestic responsibilities in the lives of mature women was considered. Here some support was found for Kondo's suggestion that, rather than paid employment being in conflict with domestic duties, for older women who are no longer engaged in childrearing there is some social pressure to be seen to do something besides housework, to be active. And this in many cases means to enter employment.

In addition, for most of these employees paid employment was a financial necessity, while their employment opportunities were limited by their age and lack of qualifications. The consequence of this was that, despite their notionally peripheral position in the circles of company affiliation, many part-timers had become long serving employees, assuming considerable responsibilities in the workplace. This in almost all cases went unrecognised by the company, and was generally explained by the women themselves in terms of lack of other options rather than by any commitment to Futajimaya.

There are similarities here with the situation of men of the same generation in as much as for employees between forty and retirement age, whether male or female, it becomes progressively more difficult to find

another employer, and the talk of moving on to better things that one hears so much of from the younger staff tends to disappear. However, while for male employees long service leads to better financial rewards and is thought of as the normal pattern; for part-timers it brings little improvement in their hourly rate, and is referred to as something of an embarrassing accident, "Well I never intended to stay so long but..."

Looking at employment from a life course perspective, it becomes clear that there is much more involved in the relationship between company and employee than would appear from the stereotypes familiar outside Japan of the dedicated company man and his counterpart the office lady, who in due course metamorphoses into the full-time 'professional' housewife. Generation as well as gender plays an important role here, and there is a degree of overlap between men and women in the way in which they balance the demands of work with their lives outside the company.

However, the disjuncture between idealised gendered life course in Japan and actual personal narratives mean that similar patterns are regarded, and expressed, in quite different ways depending on if the protagonist is male or female. An energetic and efficient unmarried section chief in his late twenties is regarded as a success if he is a man, and probably a good promotion prospect and marriage prospect too. But if a woman, she becomes the butt of jokes, the image of everything the younger women do not wish to become, still working full time past marriageable age. And it is, as everyone knows, unlikely that the company will promote her further.

Conversely, a woman in her early twenties with no particular long term commitment to her company, who is working to save up for her dream of becoming a make-up artist is regarded as pretty ordinary. However, her

male counterpart, the *furiita* or uncommitted company member who plays in a rock band in the evenings, is regarded as daring and interesting by his contemporaries, a bad marriage prospect by possible in-laws.

11.3 Diversity within the company

Turning back again to a company-centred perspective, but this time in the inside sphere of the work-place and company-organised activities, one of the most striking findings was the disjuncture between the representations Futajimaya has created of itself both in its corporate literature and in the training programme and entrance ceremonies as an essentially harmonious entity, and the level of discord and discontent expressed by employees in the private setting of conversations with fellow employees, or with the protection of anonymity guaranteed by the union survey.

Workplace hierarchies were not found to work smoothly, with ranking principles of employment status, gender, and generation cross-cutting each other, so that no simple pyramid of vertically structured relations could be discerned. A particular trouble spot here was the relationship between older women employed on a part-time basis and young female full company members. In addition to tensions among employees, employee views of the company were also far from positive, with strong criticisms expressed by a significant proportion of both male and female employees. There was also a strong sense of the divide between management and junior staff, or "us" and "them", a division that is generally said to be weak or absent in discussions of Japanese companies.

This more critical view of Futajimaya differs from corporate representations described above not only in that it is employee rather than management generated, but also in that it was expressed in the context of a

dialogue among insiders. In Japan, a high value is placed on the presentation of a harmonious outside face. In contrast, in an *uchi* context, among members of the same group, criticism and dissent become far more acceptable. It is therefore to be expected that on gaining membership of any organisation, or section of an organisation, previously unseen internal conflicts would become visible.

However, even within the *uchi* of the company, there was an important distinction between private and public arenas, informal and formal discourse, and the degree to which criticism could be expressed in each. Whereas in informal conversations among employees criticisms of the company were freely voiced, there was reticence about expressing such criticisms in the various formal "consultative" activities organised by management. This was linked to a deep cynicism amongst employees about such activities, and a general belief that these public events were just "for show". Indeed, instead of providing channels for employee suggestions about the company might be better run, they tended to be interpreted as exercises in self-criticism by the staff. Any problems that they wished company management to address tended to be tackled privately, through the branch hierarchy.

There were also clearly some misgivings among the staff about the possible repercussions of public expressions of criticism. One example of this was the reluctance of part-time staff to push for representation of their interests, following the sacking of a number of part-timers who had tried to set up their own union. For those who were unionised, the union itself provided their best opportunity to criticise management through its anonymous surveys.

Even within the company, then, a plurality of voices can be heard, sounding different notes on different occasions. The relativity of the terms *soto* and *uchi* are once again highlighted, with spheres of involvement in the company leaving many employees with the sense that they are still outsiders to the decision making process. Ironically, this sense seems - if anything - to have been heightened by the supposedly consultative activities, which highlighted the junior staff's role of audience, for whose benefit these events were staged. And, as was the case for events involving the new recruits, there is a disjuncture between public and private, formal and informal, with public and formal occasions tending to generate a discourse of consensus. However, as we have seen with the entrance ceremony, such events also often had a range of sub-texts that were somewhat at variance with their official message.

For example, turning to those events designed to celebrate membership of Futajimaya, at branch, regional or national level, we have seen that the explicit text of unity and the celebration of the group was underlaid by subtexts of individual aspirations. Career-track employees used these events to build and consolidate their own personal networks, while many of the younger employees simply used them as opportunities to socialise with others of similar age at the company's expense. The importance of divisions based on gender and generation were thrown into relief here, with middle aged women, whether full company members or part-timers present only in very small numbers at most of these events. The luxury-goods fairs were the one exception to this rule, and at these middle-aged women came into their own as privileged intermediaries between company and consumer, their marginal status for once turned to their advantage.

11.4 *Soto/Uchi* and the Japanese company

The Futajimaya material thus underlines the importance of considering context when discussing issues such as "the Japanese company" or "Japanese management". It also suggests that the representations of Japanese companies familiar outside Japan are partial, and draw on elements of company life that are stressed in particular contexts. These various elements are then reassembled with an orientalist gloss, as being uniquely Japanese and rooted in Japanese tradition, a gloss that is strikingly at odds with the internal Japanese debate, in which companies are at pains to establish themselves as internationally minded, youthful, and modern.

However, this does not mean either that this outside view is a result of naive misinterpretation by foreigners, or of a deliberate misrepresentation by Japanese contributors to this debate. It is more a result of the tension between *soto* and *uchi*, outside and inside, where the public face of institutions emphasises harmony and group solidarity, and conflicts and tensions are reserved for a private, inside arena. In addition, the descriptions of Japanese company life produced by Japanese people for the benefit of those unfamiliar with it suffer from the shortcomings that Bourdieu (1977) has identified for informant-anthropologist discourse in general, as already suggested in Chapter One.

In the case of Japanese companies as represented abroad, leaving "unsaid all that goes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977:18) tends to involve omitting mention of the conflict and tension that is common knowledge among the Japanese, but not thought to be appropriate subject matter for a *soto* or outside context. The exclusion of particular cases leads to the depiction of Japanese companies as homogeneous, and their employees as following

highly predictable and stable paths through their working lives, free from the ambiguities, dilemmas, compromises, and changes of direction, that emerge when individual life stories are considered. Finally, the use of a rule-based vocabulary to express company life finds its expression in the highly influential group model adopted by Nakane(1970) and others, the drawbacks of which have already been considered in Chapter One.

However it is equally misleading to reject entirely all notions of group cooperation, harmony, and transformation of self under the auspices of the company to which one belongs. At the least, these are influential ideals. The interplay of generally accepted ideals and personal experience can be seen particularly clearly in the case of the Chief, given in Chapter Eight, where his story of leaving his first company after a row with his boss, and entering Futajimaya because he had no other choice, was juxtaposed with his account of the differences between Japanese companies and those in the West, with the salaryman portrayed as heir to a feudal tradition of unquestioning, self-sacrificing loyalty.

The Chief did not seem to experience these accounts as in contradiction, any more than his pronouncement that women's place was in the domestic sphere appeared to have precluded him from urging his old friend Mrs Miura to work for Futajimaya, or from giving her an unusual degree of responsibility for a part-time woman employee. Rather, these were two different types of statement: the one general, concerning how things ought to be; and the other personal, concerned with how they were in a particular case. If the first could be termed as in some sense a *soto, tatemae,* sort of statement, this did not make it, from his perspective, untrue; neither was the more personal account more valid for belonging to the realm of *uchi* and *honne.* The two inhabited parallel universes of discourse, each

appropriate to a different sort of context. They were not seen as inconsistent because they did not occupy the same frame. An important element in understanding company employee relations in Japan would therefore seem to be an understanding of the frame within which they are articulated, and the kind of discourse which that frame tends to generate.

It should also be stressed here that in the context of the company a plurality of both outside and inside representations exist, and indeed the definition of what is outside and what is inside is always shifting. As we have seen, the representation of Japanese companies directed towards the widest definition of outside, the world beyond Japan, is in marked contrast to another sort of outsider-orientated discourse within Japan, that of the annual recruitment drive. And in the Futajimaya case in particular, the boundary of the company appears permeable, given the varying degrees of membership and involvement of different categories of employee, and the near interchangeability of part-time employees, ex-*seishain*, and customers shown at events such as the *chōbikai*. The Futajimaya case, and, one suspects, the retail sector in general, tends to undermine Nakane's argument that Japanese companies are relatively closed groups.

It is therefore not possible to oppose a discourse for outsiders to one for insiders in any simple sense, and equally any dualistic analysis based solely on the opposition of appearances (*tatemae*) and reality (*honne*) is seriously flawed. Rather, there are certain common themes that are dealt with very differently in different contexts.

Notions of conflict and harmony provide one example of this contextual shifting. The influential social norm of presenting a harmonious face to outsiders has already been noted. However, as the definition of inside and

outside is always shifting, so, too, does the arena in which conflict can be expressed. To a non-company member, little intra-company conflict is likely to be admitted to at all. But even within the company, sections, or groupings of employees to whom the viewer stands in the position of outsider are likely to strive to present a harmonious face.

In addition to the tension between outside and inside, that between formal and informal and public and private are also very important. We have seen above the way in which a single event within the company, for example the company sports day, has both a formal and informal side, a public agenda existing side by side with various private agendas. And while the formal discourse on this occasion stressed corporate unity, in the private informal networking that went on in the intervals between events, more personal ambitions and alliances were pursued. The formal discourse on such occasions is seen less as an untruth than as an irrelevance. This in turn is suggestive for *Nihonjinron* type representations of Japanese companies, which draw heavily on statements made on such formal occasions.

But perhaps the most valuable gain from viewing Japanese company life through this relational, interpretative perspective arises from the inconsistencies and contradictions in the various ways companies may be represented by their management, their employees, and other interested observers, depending on context. Looking first at some of the individual accounts of those connected with Futajimaya: a manager praises the virtues of group cooperation and a "sticky" sense of togetherness before breaking off to recount how he was fired from a previous job for arguing with his superior. An elderly woman "part-timer" who has worked a thirty-five hour week at Futajimaya for the past fifteen years complains about the lack

of staying power of the new "full-time" recruits, but on another occasion comments that she herself never intended to stay as long as she has. On the same floor, a young man on the career track, earmarked for promotion, tells me he joined in order to leave home and have his own room.

One long serving woman employee recalls with nostalgia the old dormitories where two or three shared a room and lasting friendships were forged; while one of her contemporaries complains about how awful the same dormitories were, and insists I tell the world that Futajimaya lied about the dormitories in the recruitment brochures. A middle-aged woman chatting amicably over tea at a Futajimaya luxury goods sale and being suitably pampered by uniformed staff turns out to be an ex-employee. Once a full company member, forced to resign on becoming pregnant, she rejoined on lower wages as a "part-timer" before leaving permanently for a better paid job. She never misses a sale, mainly because it gives her a chance to see her old friends.

Seen through the ever shifting lens not only of official occasions but also of these personalised accounts, the company becomes a dynamic entity, its boundaries and role in its employees' lives fluid, open to change. For the most part neither alienated nor enveloped, employees' relations with the company are complex, not reducible to a simple formula; constrained, but not defined, by gender and generation.

By the same token, no single authoritative representation of Futajimaya can be uncovered. The company's identity appears to shift, a negotiated entity responding to its various different audiences. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, management may sometimes represent the company as a facilitator of employees' individual needs and aspirations, while at other

times sternly reminding them that they must change their way of thinking and eliminate self-centred attitudes. Internationalism is stressed during the recruitment drive, but the Japanese flag is proudly flown at all company ceremonies. There is also a historical dimension, with Futajimaya, as a post-war company now in decline, showing a series of transformations in the course of its existence.

It is in these shifts in corporate representations, both from an employee-centred and from a company-centred perspective that a creative dynamic may be found. Change can be identified and accounted for, and the various inconsistencies and contradictions in the ways in which the company and its relations with its staff are represented create a room for manoeuvre that is absent both from the more static group model and from stratification models such as that suggested by Sugimoto and Mouer (1989). The possibility of individual choice is restored, and with it a richer view of Japanese employees and the various ways in which work is integrated into their lives. Nor is work the only important issue here: as discussed above, the role that companies play in life course is closely intertwined with internal Japanese debates about adulthood and maturity.

For the Japanese themselves, this multiplicity of discourses with the ever-present tension between *soto* and *uchi*, *tatemae* and *honne* type statements, is a rich source of irony and humour that is used extensively in popular culture. Company scenes work well here, with the formal appearance of hard work and dedication often contrasted with a different personal agenda. For example, a recent television drama serial followed the adventures of a new recruit to a department store, as he sought to impress a young woman working at the store with his hard work and enthusiasm. Unfortunately for him, his section chief happens to be the girl's father,

and has strong suspicions that his motives for working so hard are not entirely based on his desire to serve the company.

Another example is that of Shima-kun, a salaryman featured in a long running popular comic book for adults. When he accepts a posting to New York without his wife and daughter, he is highly praised by his superiors for his unusual dedication and loyalty to his company. The reader, however, has been shown enough domestic scenes to know that Shima-kun and his wife are not getting on well, and he is happy to get away from her. But it is in New York itself that the most trenchant statement of the author's views on the Japanese work ethic is made, as Shima-kun is confronted by the American woman he has taken back to a hotel telling him that she loves her work, and thinks that most Americans feel loyalty to their company and country. When she asks him what his feelings are the author writes:

> Suddenly I didn't know what to say. When I stop to think about it I don't have any particular loyalty to company or country...I'd never really paid much attention to it, but maybe most Japanese feel the same way.

What both these examples illustrate is that for most Japanese people dedication to company is a cliche for the salaryman, and one that may conceal a range of different personal agendas. In the popular imagination the large company is a dominant frame, but one within which a variety of different dramas may be played out, not all of which by any means will be work related. And popular culture also provides a forum within which hegemonic views on work can be challenged.

11.5 *Musubi* (Tying together)

The inescapable conclusion would seem to be that any notion of a homogeneous entity that could be termed "The Japanese Company" is highly misleading. Rather than an objective phenomenon awaiting

description, any given company in Japan is an entity the role and significance of which is subject to conflicting and shifting interpretations. The most important factor in these shifts is context: specifically orientation between the poles of *soto* and *uchi*; formal and informal; public and private, three pairs of contrasts which overlap but are not identical. However, also of importance are gender, generation, and employment status, since the company clearly does not mean the same thing to all of its employees.

Also, although companies play an important role not only in their employee's working lives, but also in areas that might be considered more personal, such as their leisure activities and even their transformation from child to adult, this does not mean that the company can be said to "envelop" its employees, as argued by Nakane(1970) and others. Rather, these areas of involvement are also areas of negotiation, where meanings may be contested, and where employees may often consciously make use of their company. In all this, employees are less passive than they are often depicted as being.

The way in which Japanese companies have been described outside Japan would seem to be misleading in so far as one type of representation, the formal, public representation of the relationships binding the permanent male employees to their company and to each other, has been given disproportionate weight. This has led to a focus on "vertical" relations (Nakane 1970), with little consideration of the complex way in which factors affecting rank may cross-cut in the very mixed workforce that is found in many Japanese companies. In addition, the tendency of published accounts to reflect companies' outward projections of themselves through, for example interviews with management, as relied on heavily by

Abegglen (1958), has led to an emphasis on harmony which tells us more about Japanese social values than about the actual incidence or lack of conflict within any given company.

The case of Futajimaya would tend to suggest that harmony, while extolled as the ideal and presented as the norm to outsiders, is far from being the norm in day to day relations within the company. Conflict is indeed built into the employment system, in the retail sector at least, and presumably in all sectors that employ part-time middle-aged female employees alongside new graduate full company members, in so far as the ranking principles of generation and experience on the one hand, and official employment status on the other, cross-cut each other.

This highlights another shortcoming in the existing published material: women's experiences have largely been marginalised, as women tend to be seen as "peripheral" to the workforce. Furthermore, women tend to be referred to as a homogeneous category, ignoring the complex area of the relations between women employees of different generation and employment status. It is the argument of this thesis that to classify women employees as peripheral, and therefore to dismiss their experiences as irrelevant, is simply to reflect official management discourse. What is or is not peripheral depends very much on where the central focus is placed. This thesis has tried, by employing successive shifts in focus, to problematise this marginalisation of women employees, and also to assess more critically the consequences of the representation of women employees as peripheral from a company-centred perspective. As we have seen, at times this representation serves to exclude women from career advancement, regardless of length of service. More rarely their notionally peripheral position can become an advantage, placing them in a mediating

position between the male central hierarchy of the company, and the store's largely female customers, many of whom were friends, relatives, or even former colleagues of the part-time female staff.

Another important point emerging from the Futajimaya material is that women employees cannot be depicted as a homogeneous category. Differences of generation and employment status are very important among women employees, and it is essential to take account of these differences in order to understand the web of employee relations within the company.

This thesis has thus sought to remedy some of the imbalances in the published literature by examining a company with a wide range of employees, men and women, young and middle-aged, company members and part-timers. The different perspectives of these different employees have been considered, both in normative terms relative to their age and gender, and in more individual terms. Taking my cue from current trends in anthropological thinking, I have applied an interpretative approach, attempting to give greater voice to the protagonists, and moving away from a model-based approach. Inconsistencies and contradictions remain in the various discourses of company relations presented here, but it is my argument that it is precisely these inconsistencies that are interesting and worthy of study, in that they act as pointers to areas of dispute and change.

On a more general theoretical level, this thesis has shown the way in which the notions of *soto* and *uchi* link with wider concerns about formality and informality, insider and outsider discourse. The Futajimaya material suggests that a contextual approach using these notions as a frame may help us to arrive at a more complex and rounded view of social

interaction, conflict, and change. It has also been demonstrated that a number of alternative discourses of company-employee relations co-exist in Japan, and it would be a mistake to privilege the most visible and public of these discourses, or to attribute to such public discourse a coercive power by virtue of its formality, as Bloch would appear to do in his discussion of formalised speech and oratory (1975).

To privilege public, formalised discourse, or to attribute to it a coercive power, is to take outsider orientated discourse at face value, and to ignore the range of possibilities offered by the interplay between *soto* and *uchi*, *tatemae* and *honne*, which provide such a rich vein of irony and social criticism in Japan, as manifested particularly in Japanese popular culture. And it is precisely this emphasis on an outsider-orientated discourse that has perpetuated a singularly distorted view of Japanese company-employee relations in the majority of publications on this topic, among which Abegglen(1958), with his reliance on interviews conducted as a visiting researcher and outsider *par excellence*; and Nakane(1970), with her elegant statement of the *tatemae* of Japanese social relations expressed in the terms of British structural-functionalism, are particularly notable.

This thesis has suggested an alternative approach, which seeks to avoid the twin pitfalls of simply reproducing an outsider-oriented discourse on the one hand, or on the other hand searching for an underlying truth of Japanese company-employee relations, and in the process dismissing, or ignoring the ways in which those involved have represented those relations. By applying Foucault's notion of taking discourse as the object of analysis, and examining a range of different, overlapping discourses concerning relations between company and employee, I have tried to present a kaleidoscopic picture, and thereby to suggest the complexity

inherent in the range of company-employee interactions in any large Japanese company. What has been aimed at here is something like the story told by the Kurosawa film Rashomon, in which the same event is seen many times through the eyes of different witnesses and protagonists. Although their stories at times seem at odds with each other, in the end we arrive not only at a more rounded view of the event itself than any single account could provide, but also at an understanding of those involved and its significance to them.

Appendix One

Futajimaya Motto and Statement of Management Vision

1. Management Vision: To be loved by the customer
To aim to be a diversified general merchant

2. Motto: Expand - network of kindness
Join together - network of trust
Extend - network of competitiveness

3. Standards of Action: TOUCH heart

1) The keyword TOUCH

- TIMELY	make management and stores appropriate to the times
- ORGANISATION	Management organisation bringing together knowhow
- UNITE	All employees unite their efforts
- COMMUNICATION	Close consensus within the company, dialogue with customers
- HUMANITY	Considerate service with a human touch

2) The keyword heart
The hearts of the customers
The united hearts of all employees - from regular employees to management

3) These two keywords together make TOUCH heart.
This means:
Make contact with (touch) the customers hearts
Link together (touch) all the employees hearts - from regular employees to management

Appendix Two

Timetable of Initial training course for female high-school graduates March 1991

	Day one	Day two	Day three	Day four	Day five	Day six
7.00 a.m.			Wake up Wash	Wake up Wash	Wake up Wash	Wake up Wash
7.30		Wake up Wash	Roll call Exercises	Roll call Exercises	Roll call Exercises	Roll call Exercises
8.00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
8.30			Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning
9.00.		Roll call 9.20 talk by personnel manager	Go over test distributed before course.	Dealing with customers 2: (Content depending on Sales Assistant trainer)	Basic calculating	
10.00		Summary of the contents of the company training course (20 minute break)	Gift wrapping	Taking money and goods etc.	(10 minute break) Basics of colour images	(10 minute break) Test
11.00		10.40. Employment standards Welfare Insurance				
12.00	Reception	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch (Change clothes)
13.00		Manners in the workplace (video and talk)	Fire awareness and training	The correct knowledge and use of credit	Basics of colour images	Collected from centre
14.00		(10 minute break) 14.20 Dealing		card slips etc. at the cash register.	(10 minute break) Separate training	
15.00	Orientation Rules of course	with customers (video and talk)	(10 minute break) Dealing with	(15 minute break) DO! SPORT	by section. Vocabulary	
16.00	Medical Examination Administrative Formalities	(10 minute break) Let's get to know each other	customers 1: basic expressions, movement,		Special characteristics of section Flow of goods Basic knowledge	
17.00		Communication games and educational games	wrapping practice		of materials	
18.00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
19.00			Test	Meeting	Visit to local branch of Futajimaya	
20.00						

Appendix Three

Futajimaya training course for new company members: course rules

Main points of daily schedule

7.00 Rise
Wash
7.30 Exercises
8.00 Breakfast
Cleaning
9.10 Lectures begin
12.00 Lunch
13.00 Lectures
18.00 Dinner
19.00 Lectures
20.00 Bath
Free time
21.30 Dormitory gates close
Self study
23.30 Lights out
Go to bed

Living Rules

1. Timekeeping
   1. Keep to the scheduled time
   2. Assemble 5 minutes before (lectures, exercises, etc.)

2. Greet others first, brightly and cheerfully
   1. When passing each other in the corridor:
      morning: *Ohayō gozaimasu* (good morning)
      midday: *Konnichiwa* (hello)
      evening: *Konbanwa* (good evening)

3. How to walk in the corridors
   1. Don't make a noise (only wear slippers after a bath)
   2. Don't run
   3. Don't walk while having a private conversation
   4. Answer *hai* (yes) when called

4. Toilet
   1. Be careful to be economical in your use of water.
   2. Don't go into the toilet with your shoes on
   3. Arrange your shoes neatly when you go in.
   4. Arrange the toilet slippers neatly when you go out.

5. Going out

1. Going out is only permitted between 8.00 p.m. and 9.30 p.m. (only in order to go shopping)
2. Before going out, enter your name and room number in the going out register.
3. Be quiet when you go out, as the centre is in a residential area.
4. Always put your slippers in the shoe cupboard.
5. Going out alone is forbidden.
6. When you go out, say, *ittekimasu* (I'm going out)
   When you come back, say *kairimashita* (I'm back)

6. Dress

1. Wear tracksuits during lectures.
2. Put your name plate on the left side of your chest.
3. Keep your track suit top's fasteners neatly done up.

7. Dormitory rooms

1. Don't put photos etc. on the door or walls.
2. After getting up, fold up the bedding into four, and place your pillow on top of it.
3. Don't speak in a loud voice.
4. After lights out, go to sleep quietly.
5. When you leave the room, don't forget to turn out the lights.

8. Cleaning

1. Cleaning is done by everyone, every morning.
2. The cleaning rota is posted up on the bl ackboard.
3. Rubbish from the rooms is thrown out daily (unburnable and burnable should be separated).
4. Take the initiative to clean the blackboard after lectures.
5. Put the desks straight 5 minutes before lectures begin.

9. Meals

1. Since it is crowded at mealtimes, be considerate of others and finish quickly (breakfast is in separate han)
2. Don't leave food.
3. When you have finished, return your dishes and cutlery promptly.
4. When you start eating say *itadakimasu.*
   When you finish eating say *go chisōsama.*

10. Bathing

1. No bathing outside the prescribed hours.
2. The last person to use the bath must report to the office afterwards.

11. Use of the Television room

1. Keep to lights out time
2. Don't speak in loud voices and make a disturbance.
3. Always tidy up rubbish.

12. Other

1. Deposit valuables at office.
2. Inform the office if you feel unwell.
3. Do not make long telephone calls.

13. Rules for lectures

1. Greetings for the beginning and end of lectures:
   Beginning: *Kiritsu, rei* (stand up, bow).
   Onegaishimasu (please)
   End: *Kiritsu, rei*
   arigatō gozaimashita (thank you)
2. Don't lean on your elbows, don't fold your arms across your chest, don't cross your legs.
3. Always take notes.

14. Roll call

1. Morning roll call, 7.25 a.m., either in the new hall or on the 2nd floor. Each room leader should say:
   room number X, Y members, Y present, all present and correct.
2. Evening roll call, 10.00p.m. at reception, as above.

15. Smoking and drinking alcohol are forbidden

Those who do not keep the above rules score zero points, and will be reported to the store manager of the branch to which they have been allocated.

Always keep your dormitory rooms tidy, as it is sometimes essential to enter them during lecture hours.

Appendix Four

Workplace Rules

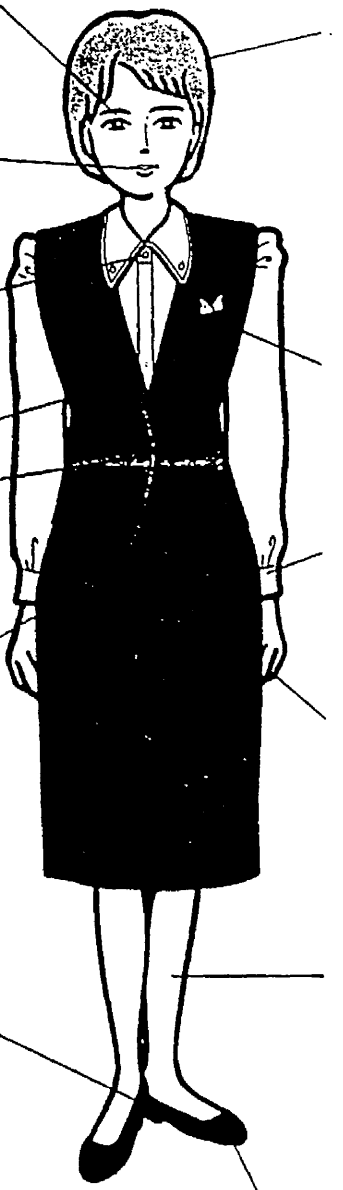
Dress and Appearance

* Avoid extremely heavy make-up, be careful that it does not look unnatural.
* Do not use thick eyeshadow or eyeliner.
* Do not use rouge of a colour that contrasts too strongly with your foundation.
* Glasses with dark tinted lenses or highly decorated frames are forbidden.
* Avoid strong smelling perfume.

* Use lipstick of a color close to that of your lips (of a red, orange or pink hue).
* Use a minimum of lipstick.

* The blouse buttons must be done up right to the top.
* Tuck the blouse inside the skirt.
* Keep your uniform clean and neat.
* Be careful about personal cleanliness, make yourself agreeable to the customers.
* Always keep your waistcoat buttoned.
* For dirty work, wear the work apron specified by your branch. Remove as soon as work is finished.
* The use of sales aprons is standardised throughout the branch at the discretion of the branch manager.
* Only use the authorised company cardigan over your blouse.
* The cardigan is worn over the waistcoat, and must be buttoned all the way up.

* Shoes should be in good repair and conform to the following rules:
* They should be pumps or sandals. If sandals, they must have a back strap.
* Do not slip your heels out of the shoes.
* Heels must be 5cms or less. Avoid very thin heels.
* Do not wear casual shoes or sports shoes.
* Shoe colour must be navy or black (white is also allowed with the summer uniform).



* Always stand up straight with your shoulders back.
* Your fringe must not reach your eyebrows.
* Hair fasteners must be black and unpatterned, they should create a favourable impression on the customers. Flowery decorations are prohibited.
* Hair dye is restricted to black or a natural looking chestnut.
* Curly or afro hair is forbidden
* "Sauvage" cuts must be tied back.
* Earrings, bracelets, and other showy accessories are forbidden. Stud type earrings for pierced ears with no stone are permitted.
* A chain may be worn around the neck if it is not visible.

* The name plate must be worn on the left breast pocket.
* Only authorised badges may be worn.

* Do not roll up your sleeves when working in sales or dealing with customers.

* Keep your nails clean and do not let them grow too long (they should not be visible when your palms are turned upwards).
* Nail polish must be clear or light pink.
* If you wear nail polish, be careful it is not chipped.
* One plain ring without a stone may be worn.

*When thick tights or socks are worn, they must be of the type recognised by the company (the branch manager in each store).
1) Within the branch, everyone should wear the same type.
2) They must be navy blue or white in colour.
* Panty stockings must be beige, brown, or grey in colour. Patterned stockings and bare legs are not allowed.

* Nail polish must be clear or light pink. If worn, be careful it is not chipped.

Appendix Five

Futajimaya Company Song

Be like the sunbird

We always want to be with
People who don't forget to have a loving heart.
We shall extend the kindness
Of an outstretched hand
Like the sweet murmurings
Of the sunbird
Of the sunbird

We are willing to walk anywhere
With people who don't forget to have a trusting heart.
The certainty of joined hands
Fills our hearts with joy
Like the radiance
Of the sunbird
Of the sunbird

You call a new wind
Like the sunbird
Who soars up into the blue sky

We want to flourish
Looking at people who don't forget to have a dream in their heart
Striving with both hands
Taking wing to tomorrow
Our hearts beating
Like the wings
Of the sunbird
Of the sunbird

You will become a new wind
Like the sunbird
Who flies up into the heavens

Glossary

The romanisation of Japanese terms in the text has been done in accordance with the system used by the Kenkyusha Japanese-English dictionary. This dictionary has also been used to help compile the definitions used in the glossary.

1. Japanese era names

Although the Western calendar is understood in Japan, the Japanese have another system of counting years based on the emperors' reigns, with each reign referred to as an era. In the period immediately preceding Japan's opening to the West, however, power was invested in a shogunate, and this period is usually referred to either by the name of the shogun family, Tokugawa, or by the old name of Tokyo, Edo, which was the capital of the shoguns at this time (the imperial capital remained at Kyoto until the Meiji restoration in 1868). The most recent era names and dates are given below.

Tokugawa (Edo) era: 1603-1867
Meiji era: 1868-1912
Taisho era: 1912-1926
Showa era: 1926-1989
Heisei era: 1989-

2. Japanese terms used in the text

akarui	明るい	cheerful, bright
akutibu	アクティブ	active
anko	アンコ	sticky bean paste. Used metaphorically to refer to close, friendly atmosphere
arigatō gozaimashita	ありがとうございました	Thank you very much

arubaito アルバイト — term used for employees with no long-term commitment to the company, often students working part-time, or during their vacations. From the German, *arbeit*. See Chapter Two, pp 76-77, for a full explanation.

bumonchō 部門長 — section chief

chakuseki 着席 — sit down

chan ちゃん — affectionate suffix, commonly used for children, and also sometimes for young women.

charenji チャレンジ — exert yourself, from the English, challenge.

chēn stoā チェーンストアー — chain store. See Chapter Two.

chiimuwāku チームワーク — teamwork

chōbikai 長美会 — luxury goods sale held at Futajimaya. Literally, "Forever beautiful meeting".

chōrei 朝礼 — morning meeting

chotto ちょっと — a little

chūtō saiyō 中途採用 — mid-career recruitment. See Chapter Two, p. 74.

daikoku-sama 大黒様 — Shinto god of prosperity

daikokubashira 大黒柱 — main pillar of house, principal wage-earner of household. See Chapter Eight, p. 259.

dainamikku ダイナミック — dynamic

dai senpai	大先輩	senior *senpai*, literally "big" *senpai*.
dasai	ダサイ	out of date
dekiru	できる	can
depāto	デパート	department store. See Chapter Two.
direkushon	ディレクション	direction, a foreign loan word suggesting the double meaning carried by the English term of orientation and film direction.
dōkisei	同期生	company member who joined in the same year's intake
doko demo ii	どこでもいい	anywhere will do, it doesn't matter where
dokujisei	独自性	individuality
dokyumento	ドキュメント	document
dōkyūsei	同級生	people of the same level, students in the same year at school or university.
fuhensei	普遍性	universality
furii arubaito	フリーアルバイト	see *furiitā*
furiitā	フリーター	young person who opts for employment as a casual worker, or *arubaito*, instead of as a regular company employee. From the English, free. See Chapter Four, p. 122.
Futajimayajin	二島屋人	Futajimaya person. From Futajimaya and *jin*, meaning person.

futsū	普通	ordinary, usual
gaijin	外人	foreigner, non-Japanese. Literally, outside person.
gakubatsu	学閥	school clique. See Chapter Four, p. 112.
gakusei	学生	student. Category often opposed to *shakaijin*, see note below.
gaman	我慢	endurance
ganbarizumu	頑張りずむ	giving it all you've got. From *ganbaru*, to do your best, and the English, -ism.
ganbarimasu	頑張ります	I/We will do my/our best
ganbatte kudasai	頑張って 下さい	please do your best
genki ga ii	元気がいい	lively
geretsu	下劣	base, loutish.
gimu	義務	duty, obligation
hai	はい	yes
han	班	squad
hanseikai	反省会	reflection circles
hattchū	発注	ordering
higashi	東	East
hima	暇	free, not busy

hitobito	人々	people
hoikuen	保育園	day nursery
honne	本音	real feelings. See Chapter One, p. 40.
hyakkaten	百貨店	department store, literally, one hundred goods store. See Chapter Two.
ichininmae	一人前	a complete person. One of a number of terms for "adult" in Japanese. See Chapter Five for a full discussion of notions of adulthood in Japan.
ichiryū	一流	first class, first rate. See also *niryū*.
ie	家	household. See Chapter One, pp 24-27.
ii	いい	good
ii kandōsha	いい感動者	enthusiastic, active person
ikebana	生け花	flower arranging
ikigai	いきがい	what makes life worth living
irasshaimase	いらっしゃいませ	welcome
iya desu	いやです	yucky, I don't like it (see *yada*)
jibun	自分	self
jibunrashiku	自分らしく	something that suits you, reflects your personality. From *jibun*, self, and *rashii*, to be like, have an air of.

jinji	人事	personnel
jūjitsu	充実	fulfillment
junbi	準備	preparation
junshain	準社員	Literally, associte company member. A type of employee who is not a full company member, a sub-division of the category of *pāto*. For a full explanation see Chapter Three, p. 104
kaisha	会社	company
kaishashugi	会社主義	corporatism, from *kaisha*, company, and *shugi*, -ism.
kaisha setsumeikai	会社説明会	company explanation meeting. See Chapter Four p. 115
kankei nai	関係ない	no connection, nothing to do with
kanri	管理	management, control, supervision
kansha	感謝	gratitude
karaoke	カラオケ	literally, "empty orchestra", refers to a type of entertainment invented in Japan where people sing to a backing tape, often in bars.
karyū	下流	inferior, literally lower class.
katakurushii	固苦しい	formal, stiff, rigid, starchy
kawaisō	かわいそう	poor thing
kenri	権利	right

kibishii	厳しい	strict
kichinto	きちんと	punctiliously
kiken	危険	dangerous
kimochi	気持ち	feeling
kincho shiteiru	緊張している	feel tense
kindaika	近代化	modernisation
kiritsu	起立	stand up
kita	北	north
kitanai	汚い	dirty
kitsui	きつい	tiring
kobun kogata.	子分	worker recruited by labour boss. See
kodomo	子供	child
kogata	子方	worker recruited by labour boss. From *ko*, meaning child, and *kata*, meaning person. See also *oyakata.*
kōhai	後輩	junior. See also *senpai.*
kojin	個人	individual
kokoro	心	heart, mind, spirit. See Chapter Four, p. 133.

kokusaika	国際化	internationalisation
komakaku chekku	細かくチェック	detailed check
kono yo no hate	この世の果て	the end of this world
kore kara	これから	from here, from now, from this point
kore kara ikō	これから行こう	let's go from here, let's take it from here.
kosei	個性	individuality
koshikake	腰掛け	stopgap
kōsoku	拘束	literally, restraint. A word used for company trips organised for prospective new recruits (see Chapter Four, p. 116).
koto	こと	thing
kurō	苦労	suffering
kusari	鎖	chain
kyaria ūman	キャリアウーマン	career woman
kyōtō yūgikai	共闘遊戯会	fighting and playing meet, the antecedent of the modern day sports day, or *undōkai*, at companies and schools.
kyūjinhō	求人報	notice of employment available, circulated in high-schools

Kyūshū danji 九州男児 Literally, Kyūshū man (Kyūshū is the southernmost of Japan's four main islands). Men from this area of Japan are reputed to be strong and dominant.

mada まだ not yet

mada asobu jikan janai まだ遊ぶ時間じゃない its not time to take it easy yet

manga まんが comic strip

mata okoshi kudasaimase またお越し下さいませ please come again

minami 南 South
皆身 these characters can also be read *minami*, but in this case the meaning is everyone, (*mina*) body (*shin, mi*). This play on words was used by the managing director of Futajimaya in his speech to new recruits as a metaphor for co-operation (see Chapter Six, p. 190).

miseru dake 見せるだけ just for show

mizu shōbai 水商売 the night-time entertainment business. Literally, the water trade

mō ichinichi ganbarimashō もう一日頑張りましょう let's do our best for another day

modan gaaru モダンガール modern girl. See Chapter Seven, p. 227. Also *moga*

muko yōshi 婿養子 adopted son-in-law

musubi 結び tying together

ne ga akarui	根が明るい	cheerful, optimistic. Literally, "the root is bright"
nendai	年代	annual
nenkō-joretsu	年功序列	seniority pay. Literally seniority ranking, but although pay and promotion are often linked, with both depending to a great extent on length of service, the *nenkō-joretsu* system is primarily concerned with remuneration.
Nihonjinron	日本人論	popularist writing on Japan. See Chapter One, p. 24。
Nihonteki keiei	日本的経営	Japanese style management
ningen	人間	human being
ningen kankei	人間関係	human relations
niryū ichiryū.	二流	second class, second rate. See also
nishi	西	West
noshi	熨斗	nowadays, usually a strip of paper printed with a decorative knot that is attached to the outermost layer of wrapping paper of a gift. The original meaning of *noshi*, however, is a long thin dried strip of sea ear that used to be attached to gifts.

oba-san おばさん literally, aunt, but commonly used as an informal term of address and reference for middle aged women (aged from about thirty).

ochūgen 御中元 mid year gifts. For a full discussion of the practice of giving mid year and end of year gifts in Japan see Chapter Two, p. 66.

ohayō gozaimasu おはよう ございます good morning

ojō-san お娘さん young lady

omatase itashimashita お待たせ いたしました sorry to keep you waiting

omote 表 front, surface. See Chapter One, p. 45.

onegaishimasu お願いします please

onjō 温情 warm feelings

oseibo 御歳暮 year end gifts. See also *ochūgen*

osore irimasu ga おそれ いりますが sorry, but...

otona 大人 one of the Japanese terms used for adult. The characters used literally mean "big person". See Chapter Five, p. 150.

otonashii おとなしい docile, well-behaved

oyabun 親分 labour boss. See also *oyakata*.

oyakata	親方	in the context of employment, labour boss, though it is also used in sumo wrestling to mean stable master. From *oya*, meaning parent and *kata*, meaning person (see Chapter One, page 12). Also *oyabun*.
pachinko	パチンコ	a popular slot machine game resembling pinball
pāto	パート	employee who is not a full company member, and who usually works fewer hours than full company members. From the English term, part-timer. See Chapter Two, p. 75 for full explanation.
puraibeto taimu	プライベートタイム	private time
rei	礼	bow
reppaisha	劣敗者	the defeated
rōnin	浪人	originally, masterless samurai, but now widely used for a student who has failed his/her college entrance examination, and is studying to resit it.
ryōsai kenbo	良妻賢母	good wife, wise mother
ryūtsū	流通	distribution, retail
sarariiman	サラリーマン	businessman, male white collar salaried employee
sarariiman shōsetsu	サラリーマン小説	businessman novels

seijin	成人	One of the Japanese terms for adult. The characters used literally mean "become person". See Chapter Five, p. 150.
seishain	正社員	full company member. See Chapter Two, p. 28 for a detailed discussion of this term.
seishin	精神	mind, spirit, soul. See Chapter Five, p. 149.
seishin kyoiku	精神教育	spiritual education. See also *seishin*.
seishintekini awanai	精神的に合わない	It doesn't suit my temperament. See also *seishin*.
senpai	先輩	senior. Refers to earlier entrant to the same school, university, or company.
sensu	センス	from the English word "sense", used to mean a sense of style, commonly used in connection with personal appearance or interior decoration.
shafū	社風	a company's way of life, company customs.
shakai	社会	society
shakaijin	社会人	member of society, literally, society-person. One of the Japanese terms most frequently used to mean adult. See Chapter Five, p. 149.
shakaishugi	社会主義	socialism. From *shakai*, society, and *shugi*, -ism.

shichi-go-san 七五三 literally, seven, five, three. The name of a Japanese children's festival (see Chapter Six, p. 200).

shidō pātonā 指導パートナー guiding partner. See Chapter Nine, p. 288.

shigoto 仕事 work

shinjinrui 新人類 new people, new human beings. From *shin*, new, and *jinrui*, human beings. For a detailed discussion of the use of this term see Chapter Four, section 4.4.

shinnyūsei 新入生 new company member, literally "newly entered student".

shitsuke 躾 self-discipline. See Chapter Six, p. 188. Also the verb, *shitsukeru*

shitsureishimasu 失礼します excuse me

shōhin 商品 goods

shōshō omachi kudasaimase 少々お待ちくださいませ please wait a moment

soto 外 outside. See Chapter One, p. 45.

sunao 素直 gentle, meek, obedient

supā スーパー chain store. See Chapter Two.

tarento タレント teen idols. From the English, talent.

tatami 畳 straw matting commonly used as flooring in Japanese homes

tatemae	建て前	surface appearances. For a full discussion of this term, see Chapter One, pp 44-45.
teijishain	定時社員	a type of employee who is not a full company member, a sub-division of the category of *pāto*. For a full discussion of this term, see Chapter Three, p. 104.
torai suru	トライする	to try hard, from the English, try.
tsukiai	付き合い	socialising with people with whom one is linked by work. See Chapter Eight, p. 276.
tsumaranai	つまらない	boring
tsuyoi	強い	strong
uchi	内	inside. See Chapter One, p. 45.
ue no hito	上の人	person in superior position, of superior status
undōkai	運動会	sports day
ura	裏	back, underneath. See Chapter One, p. 45.
wagamama	わがまま	self-centred
wakawakashisa	若々しさ	youthfulness
wareware	我々	we
yada	やだ	yuk. See Chapter Five, p. 161.
yakuza	やくざ	Japanese mafia
yaruki	やる気	enthusiasm

yasashisa	やさしさ	kindness, gentleness
yōchien	幼稚園	kindergarten
yoi	良い	good
yome	嫁	bride, wife, daughter-in-law. See Chapter One, p. 25.

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